

# SOME HOPE AND SOME DESPAIR

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AMEBIX  
FACTION

MODESTY BLAISE  
PEDESTRIANS  
TOXIC WASTE

## I'M NOT DEAD

Not yet, anyway. So you may have been hearing rumors as to what I've been up to for the past week. It's late and I'm tired, so this is just a brief note to let you all know what is up.

I got home from tour about a week ago. It was great. Lots of fun. But I came home feeling really crappy. After two days of feeling shitty, Liberty insisted I go see a doctor. It turns out that was a very smart idea as I spent the past week at St. David's Hospital undergoing various tests and small operations.

I've always had a bad heart. Now my heart is operating at a little less than half a normal person's strength. It's pretty fucked. The doctors said I could literally drop dead at any moment. It's crazy fucked. I'm taking new meds and that will hopefully work. If not, we're talking about a defibrillator (I can't spell it). Odds are against me just dropping dead. But for the first time in my life, that's a real possibility.

Even worse than that, I found out that my kidneys have been damaged beyond repair. They shrunk, been covered in scar tissue and basically are beyond hope. As a result, I've started dialysis, which I'll be doing three times a week from now on. Basically, I need a kidney transplant and that's what the doctors are getting me ready for.

There are a lot more details I'll write when I have more time. For the moment, I've got tubes coming in and out of me. I lost 27 pounds of water weight while in the hospital. I may lose more. I dunno.

It's all sort of fucked. I don't know what I will do. More later...

(July 6<sup>th</sup>)

## STILL ALIVE

Okay, I finally had some real sleep and a third round of dialysis. I'm feeling a little saner, so here's a better account of my last week...

J Church went on a west coast tour. It was great. It was hot. The shows were fun. But despite everything, I wasn't feeling very well for the whole trip. I thought it was stress and the awful heat and the lack of sleep. None of those things are good with my heart condition and they are all part of being on the road. But I can usually handle it and my cardiologist has never really fretted about it.

But when we got home from tour I started feeling really bad. My legs felt really tight and bloated. I was having some breathing trouble and I was coughing all night long. It was so bad by the second night home that Liberty insisted I go to the ER at St. David's. Turns out that was a good idea.

I was admitted to the hospital with kidney failure. It seems that both of them crapped out on me. The doctors started doing loads of tests including an ultrasound that revealed massive scarring and damage. The thing about kidneys is that they really don't get better. When they're fucked, they're fucked. The doctor kept running tests, but it became obvious that I was going to have to go on dialysis and start thinking about a transplant.

I also started seeing a new heart specialist. While my trashed kidneys are the biggest problem, he also discovered that my heart wasn't doing well either. I guess the meds were only partly working and my heart was working at a little less than half of a normal person's strength. That's what put me in the "sudden death" category. I'm trying not to think about that as it's not completely likely. But it does mean that I could drop dead and my heart could just decide to stop at any time now...

So, I started dialysis. I was put on lasix to help get rid of the weight I had put on as a result of kidney failure. I also had my heart meds updated. I feel better than I've felt in ages. I lost 27+ pounds, which is totally crazy! I do dialysis three times a week and I have no idea how I'm gonna pay for any of this (dialysis alone without the meds is several \$1000 a month). I may get on Medicare. I've had the worst cramps I've ever experienced in my life. I can't even think about going back to work for a few weeks.

The new meds and the dialysis leave me pretty dizzy most of the time. I've also got a crazy new diet where I need lots of protein BUT I can't eat beans, nuts or tofu! To stay alive, my vegetarian days may be over. I dunno...

That's where I'm at. I'm gonna be in bed for the next few weeks so I'll try to be on this a lot. I feel tired and sore. I'm also filthy as I can't shower with all the tubes coming and going in my body. I don't know what the future is for my normal life. I definitely can't tour for a long time, though I wanna keep doing J Church stuff. I don't know how I'll be able to get to England to finish my book. I can get dialysis there. I just can't afford anything. I don't really know what capacity I'll be able to continue work at Vulcan. At the least, I probably won't be able to work the counter anymore...

Anyway, I got some sleep. I ate some grapes. I've got the

PMA

(July 6<sup>th</sup>)

## SOME AFTERTHOUGHTS

Here are a few quick answers to questions I've been getting asked a bunch:

1. Yes, I do have insurance. But it's pretty crappy and the deductible is huge. It's Humana, which kinda sucks anyway. I got it through Vulcan Video. I still don't know if it will be able to cover the dialysis. If not, I'm gonna have to apply for Medicare which I am fairly positive I qualify for.

The problem with my insurance (among other things) is that I need to be working 30 hours a week to keep it. I don't know if that's going to be a real possibility as the new meds and dialysis leave me pretty wiped out. If I lose the insurance, I'll be really screwed money-wise. It would almost be better if I lost the job totally and applied for some other social services. I don't know what is going to happen just yet. It really depends on how cooperative Humana is with everything.

2. My meds are really expensive. Not as much as the dialysis, of course (which is somewhere between \$3000 and \$4000 a month). But it's still a couple hundred dollars a month.

3. Additional bills are still mounting. I was in the hospital for a week. I had multiple ultrasounds plus x-rays and other tests. I had two rounds of dialysis in the hospital and I had a catheter test on my heart which is gonna cost a fortune. On top of that, I still need to see a cardiologist every other week to monitor my heart rate.

4. My life expectancy... I really don't know. First of all, the sudden death syndrome with my heart is a real threat. Until I get my heart rate improved, I'll constantly be in danger of that. I can stay on dialysis forever if I need to. But everyone is recommending that I get the kidney transplant as soon as possible. It's a fairly standard operation these days, about as standard as you can get. But there are no guarantees. It's real surgery and I can die. Plus there are no guarantees that the transplant will work. A working kidney transplant can last for a few years or can last a lifetime. It would really suck to have major surgery just to wind up back on dialysis in a couple of years.

5. My book... I've got to fucking finish it somehow. I'm going to keep writing trying to sort out these last interviews. I wanted to spend some time at Dial House with Crass. I also wanted to track down Vi Subversa, Pete Fender and maybe Conflict. I still need to interview them. But I don't think I can make it over to England. I don't think I'll be able to get the money together. If anyone out there has any ideas on how I can sort out these four interviews, I would hugely appreciate it.

6. I am on two diets at the same time. I am on a low sodium diet for my heart. I am also on a renal diet for my kidneys. That is the hard one as it's aimed at increasing protein while lowering potassium and phosphorous. I need lots of protein sources BUT I can't eat tofu, potatoes, beans or nuts. As you might imagine, this is going to be totally life altering. That's life I guess...

7. I'm on bed rest for two weeks. After that I can slowly try to get back to work. I won't be able to work like I used to. I can't stand at a counter for eight hours. Right now, I can't stand up for more than a few minutes without getting dizzy and lightheaded. Hopefully that will improve as I adjust to the treatments.

8. Dialysis is mostly really, really boring. I can read. I can listen to my disc man. There are TVs, but they are all shared and everyone wants to watch crap. I may try to buy a cheap laptop as I can bring that in as long as it's all charged up as we're not allowed to use any of the electrical outlets. There are a couple of side effects. One is that I on occasion will get some pretty painful cramps. The first time was the worst. It really felt like there was a rat crawling around in my calf. I also get muscle spasms, which are very, very minor. But they prevent me from sleeping through the treatment.

9. The band... time will tell. I wanna keep doing stuff. We can certainly keep recording. I just don't see us touring anymore. It's not impossible that things will be back to normal after I get my kidney transplant. I just can't imagine big month long tours happening again. But I'm still writing songs and shit, so touring or not, J Church will still be somewhat active.

So that's it. I'm at home. I don't feel very good. I'm really wiped out all the time. I will say this: if you are one of the people out there in the world that even owes me a dime, now would be a great time to pay me back. I never

this. But I gotta do it I guess. I just really want to stay away from any further meds. They're already talking about anxiety medication.

It's strange. I don't know what I think about it. I didn't get much out of the first visit. She actually is referring me to someone else. This person is supposed to be better for me. The problem is that I don't know if the new person is covered by Humana. Not that it really matters, the deductible via Humana is so high it would be a year before I work it off. Even then they only cover part of the costs...

In the meantime, I'm getting my mind off of the bullshit as much as possible. I'm hanging out with friends again. I'm reading like crazy (thanx to Anna at Last Gasp and everyone at Punk Planet) especially during dialysis. I find that reading "rock" books are the most comforting for some reason. I'm rereading "Velvets to the Voidoids" at the moment. It's something I can pick up and leave whenever I need and it's still fascinating.

I'm rediscovering jazz which is nice. It's funny because stuff like Albert Ayler and Archie Shepp used to get me super aggro when I listened to it. Now I find it sort of soothing. Sun Ra can be really relaxing and spacey. It makes up for that fact that I can't drink or smoke pot or anything that you would usually use for artificial decompression.

I also think I'm gonna spend a lot more time writing. No, it's not gonna be an emo journey through dialysis and heart disease. I'm gonna do everything I can to finish my book. If I can assemble the write equipment. I'm gonna do the final interviews for my anarcho book by phone. I'm on a stupid sleep schedule. But I think I can sort it out. I just need the gear to record phone calls and the foot pedal thing for the transposing them to type.

With any luck, I'm gonna use this time to pump out more issues of my fanzine as well. At the moment, I don't have any access to xerox copying. If anyone out there can help, I need to find someone that can scam 10 or more pages, 11 x 17, double sided, 200+ copies each. Anyone? I can trade. If not, I may go ahead and do really small runs of the zine, paying for it myself, as to keep my brain and fingers busy... I just need to be thinking of something else and I don't know when (if ever) I can play music again.

I know that I'm not really in any position to spend money on my band or label or zine. But it's good for my mental health to even do the bare minimum. So if anyone has any ideas on scamming copies or whatever, let me know. In the meantime, you can rest assured that whatever benefits have been done in my name (thanx Vinnie in SF) the money goes to actual medical costs...

I think Mike Millett and Adam Pfahler are still sorting some sort of Pay Pal thing to raise money. You can always get in touch with me directly I suppose that I really suck at dealing with cash. I literally don't have change for the bus at the moment. Still, things are gonna get better.

Here are a few things that have sort of lifted my spirits in the weirdest ways:

Fearless Freaks DVD

The Shield Around The K DVD

Camper Van Beethoven "Telephone Free Landslide Victory" LP

Television "Marquee Moon" LP

Gabby Pahinui "Gabby" LP

Yeah, I know that's sort of a weird collection of stuff. I think it's that mixture of positivism and sentimentality. I am gonna try to write a normal newsletter next time...

(August 6<sup>th</sup>)

#### NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS

Nothing new to report as far as my health goes. St David's are being a pain in the ass forwarding my records to another doctor in Houston for a second opinion. But otherwise, it's just bills, bills, bills and that's the boring truth. So this newsletter is half still talking about my problems and half an attempt to get back to writing about normal stuff.

This first half is just a brief note about money stuff. I still don't know what I'm going to do. There have been a couple of benefits that helped. I know that there has been talk of more and there is even talk of a benefit record with bands covering J Church and maybe Cringer songs (contact Chad of Project Mayhem or Chuck at Livid Records for more info...) At this point every penny counts as I'm deep in debt not even counting my new weekly and monthly bills (meds and therapy).

So, to battle that, I'm starting a small Ebay auction. It's mostly J Church stuff. But it's a start. You can find it by going to Ebay and searching HBR. Right now I owe Ebay like \$20 that I don't have. As soon as I get that sorted I'll have my auction up and running. In the meantime...

Also, I'm revamping my stupid Cafe Press shop. This is where I test out artwork as well as make available shirts and stuff that I can't really justify doing in quantities of a gross. So it's a mish mash of J Church, Cringer, Honey Bear and random photos I've purchased. I suppose at the

moment it's the only place to find Cringer merch and the best place to find Honey Bear Records merch. I'll probably do a few things for my fanzine, Some Hope and Some Despair (I'm still trying to find \$200 or someone who can scam printing to print out the next issue). It's also the one place at the moment where you can buy "Notes, Blubs And Random Thoughts: 90s Lyrics For Pseudo-Intellectuals And Weekend Revolutionaries" which is a book (for real, bound and everything) that I put together a while back of all of my early lyrics. I largely did it for my own needs. But it's kind of cool for that sort of self-indulgent thing. I'll try to keep adding stuff there, throwing up whatever I think you might be interested in. It's also a place where I made some shirts with my favorite Emma Goldman quotes. I may expand to other quotes I did. I'll be updating this constantly as I've got so many t-shirt ideas lying around. You can check it out at this link: <http://www.cafepress.com/honeybear>

I should mention that I met a second cardiologist who specializes in things like defibrillators and he was really cool. Unlike the last guy, we talked for about an hour, he seemed to really know what he was talking about and I feel like I have a much, much better grasp of the situation. I felt much better and that he even said that my heart might just get better like in the past. Rather than rush into anything, he's running a test at the end of this month and then we'll wait three months to see whether or not I'll need surgery. That's a huge relief (even though it adds a shitload more money to my debt).

(August 11<sup>th</sup>)

#### THIS IS THE MODERN WORLD

And what a great modern world it is we live in. I literally just got out of surgery a few hours ago. Wow, I honestly don't remember a thing. In fact, sedation fucking rules! Look, I don't drink, smoke or do drugs anymore. I get my kicks through post-surgical highs, okay? They cut a hole in my groin, shoved a tube up to my heart, hooked me up to two giant machines and shocked the shit out of me to try to see if I would live. They were also meant to cut open my chest and stick in a defibrillator.

The good news is that A) I didn't die under the anesthetic and B) it looks like I don't actually need a defibrillator. At least, I don't need one yet. They ran my heart through a bunch of tests while I was under and the doctor decided that I should wait and see as my heart may be doing a lot better than expected.

The bad news is A) staying alive costs money and B) I had to get my pubes shaved with a bunch of, albeit professional, women in the room. Okay, my insurance is gonna pay for most of this operation. But guess how much this surgery I had today costs? \$105,860!!! That's right, I spent more today in an hour of surgery than the cost of a house in Austin. Fuck me, right? As for the second issue, I'm not really big on being naked in front of anyone, myself included. So being half naked (the bad half) and getting shaved in a room full of lady doctors, nurses and anesthesiologists is not my idea of a good time.

Shit, I really can't complain. I could've died today. I could've been told my heart was fucked. I could've been fitted with a \$20,000 piece of machinery lodged in my chest. Even my old cardiologist who freaked me out came by and said things looked good.

The next step is to get more shit done that will financially destroy me. I need to get fitted with a permanent fistula for my dialysis and that involves minor day surgery. After that I have to start thinking about the kidney transplant and that is really scary shit. That's more fucking real surgery with serious hospital time. I am not at all psyched about that. But, shit, I'm not dead.

(August 30<sup>th</sup>)

#### WHEN IT RAINS...

...it fucking pours on my head. Fuck me! If you haven't heard back from me lately, well, my fucking computer died. It's fucked. Perfect timing, right? I dunno. I'm so broke. But I've got to finish this book. Right now, I may start looking for a new hard drive. Shit, I really can't afford it! Anyway, apologies if I've been slow in writing or whatever. I have not computer access at home for the moment.

Oh, and to make all this bullshit worse, water has been leaking from my ceiling. My bathroom and kitchen are currently flooded with dirty water from the upstairs neighbors. My apartment complex has been lame about sorting shit out (fucking Harpers Creek motherfuckers). But they finally sent a guy over today to fix everything. But with all the water, shit is still gonna be wet for a couple of days.

In the meantime, I need to replace some programs I lost on my hard drive. Do you have Photoshop, PageMaker or Dreamweaver? My original discs got destroyed in the fire a few years ago. Any help would be

follow up on that stuff. But I'm broke as hell and need to pay for my meds. Anyway, I'll let you know more when I know more.  
(July 7<sup>th</sup>)

#### DIALYSIS

Not much has happened in the past couple of days. I did learn how to spell "dialysis" which should improve the quality of these blogs. I actually did have my fourth round the other day. It was the longest one yet. They are still taking off weight and I was pretty wiped out when it was done. It's really weird. There are usually about a dozen or so other people getting treatment at the same time as me. It's sort of like a blood salon in there as everyone has their own chair, machine and attending nurse. The main difference for me is I'm about 20 years younger than everyone else. It's weird. At least the cramps aren't so bad anymore.

My social worker is a "cool" dude. No, he's nice. He just thinks he's right on, sort of like Mr. Rosso from "Freaks And Geeks". He was stoked to find out I played guitar and actually said he could help setting up dialysis in other cities if I were to hit the road. Then he started talking about how he was friends with the guitarist for Marilyn Manson and he really started to lose me.

So, I'm already sick of my own cooking. How many ways can you cook pasta without tomato sauce or salt? So far, just one. I never thought I'd get sick of olive oil and garlic. I'm craving a burrito but it's one of those things I definitely can't eat. I'm eating a lot of fruit these days.

Thanks to everyone who has written or called. I'm tired all the time and I'm still getting used to the dialysis schedule. But I'm trying to catch up with everyone who has been in touch.

(July 10<sup>th</sup>)

#### ANOTHER DAY

Call me crazy, but lately I've been feeling sort of weird talking about my heart, kidneys, mental health... I dunno. Everyone around me has health problems. I don't know why anyone especially would care about my shit. It's dumb. I've been feeling like a whiner lately. I mean, things are fucked. But things are fucked for a lot of people. This may sound trite, but bombs aren't blowing up outside my window. Things could be much worse.

Having said that, I am really stoked about all the "get well" wishes I've been getting. It's cool that I have so many cool friends that wanna help out. Thing is, I have never been the kind of person that liked dealing with money. Good times or bad, I've never liked dealing with band or label finances. As a result, I'm pretty good at fucking up money matters. So, I think it's really nice people wanna send me money to help out. I just feel weird about it. Either way, here is a list of things that may be happening....

1. Mike Millett and Adam Pfahler were talking about setting up some sort of fundraising Pay Pal account. I'm not really sure how that works. Mike was saying something along the lines of the one Alejandro Escovedo had where you make a donation and you get some MP3s of unreleased music. That could be cool since you'll at least be getting some music for money.

2. There has been talk about benefit concerts. I dunno. I feel weird about benefits. I think it's sort of lame when people do benefits for things like their record labels or fanzines of whatever. It seems like benefits should be done for more altruistic reasons. So I feel hesitant to sort out a benefit concert for me, me, me...

3. Barter. I love to trade. Do you want some 7"s, CDs or albums? There are a lot of things I could barter them away for. I need to find someone who has a connection at a copy place that can make 10 to 20, 11" x 17", double sided, pages at 200 copies of each. It's the next two issues of my fanzine that I suddenly can't afford to put out. Do you work at a copy place and wanna trade? Do you have an old laptop or TV or stereo or whatever you are thinking of getting rid of? We can trade. I've got some rare shit too. Super limited live LPs. Mail-order only singles. Out of print stuff. Trading and bartering make the world go 'round.

4. Buy our new album. It's on No Idea and it's called "The Horror Of Life". When it comes out, buy the double disc set reissuing our first two albums and a bunch of out of print stuff. It will also be on No Idea and called "Open Road: The Allied Years". When DIY punk rock works properly, the trickle down theory of economics actually sort of works. I would rather have people buy those CDs rather than send me \$12 or whatever. You get the music and I'll get a better royalty check.

There you have it. I really do appreciate all the well-wishers. It's really kind

I don't mean to sound shitty. I just feel weird whenever a lot of people take pity on me... And it happens every few years. I'm really not that much of a bad luck charm. I'm also not living a real life Final Destination (though that would be fucking cool!).

I've been getting more and more used to dialysis and my new heart meds. I'm still sleeping a lot, so if you call and I don't pick up I may just be wiped out. But I'm getting better. If you wrote me in the last week or so, you probably haven't gotten a response yet. I'm getting to it. I'll write everyone back at least a little something.

PS - Much thanks to Anna B over at Last Gasp. The reading material saved my life at dialysis. Crumb + PKD = Lance's entire subconscious (for better or worse)...

(July 15<sup>th</sup>)

#### HEART AND MONEY STUFF

So, I don't think I like my cardiologist. He's an okay guy. I just don't feel like he really gives a shit. I just had an appointment with him that lasted about 10 minutes where he didn't totally remember anything about my situation and didn't seem to even look at the EKG. He certainly doesn't know my entire history. Yet in 10 minutes he's decided that I need a defibrillator and a heart transplant. What a bunch of shit. Yes, my heart is dilated and that's not cool. But the exact same thing happened in '99 and after a few months of harder meds my heart actually went back to being normal (for the most part).

At this point, I'm not even considering the heart transplant. I think it's a ridiculous thing to commit to considering it's pretty heavy. I really think I should try every possible other option before I go down that road. I really do believe that I'm in the same situation I was in '99 and my heart could just bounce back. All of the symptoms seem identical. It means I'll have to go back to more serious meds and I'll have to really watch my diet very seriously. But, fuck it, that's a lot better than any kind of surgery. Besides, the more I know about this "sudden death" thing that my cardiologist scared me with, the more I know how totally unlikely it is. It's so unlikely that it's not surprising to me that during my first hospitalization they never suggested even a defibrillator. I'm feeling really skeptical about this young doctor from Texas as opposed to the more serious staff at San Francisco General. Maybe I need to go back there.

I don't trust doctors. They always seem to have ulterior motives. I'm naturally suspicious. I am certainly gonna search out second and third and tenth opinions. Any suggestions would be greatly appreciated. I know I need to see more doctors of all stripe and that means I'm financially even more screwed.

I'm now officially in no position to turn down any benefits or donations or whatever. I just found out that St. David's Hospital is billing \$40,000 for my stay. I don't know what happens next. I do know that my coverage through Humana really, really sucks. I found out that they don't cover enough of dialysis to make it worth my while. I am currently in the process of applying for Medicare. I should get it. But who fucking knows. Dialysis is \$3000+ a month. Any help would be greatly appreciated.

I am in the process of pulling together a big record auction. It's tough because I'm wiped out a lot of my free time and I'm back at work. It's tough. But I gotta figure something out. Anyone know how to get the people from Au Go Go in Australia to send me any kind of statement?

(July 25<sup>th</sup>)

#### UPDATES AND STUFF

Not a ton has happened in the past week except that I think I'm a lot calmer. I'm not in any sort of freak out mode. I'm not depressed. I'm not pissed. I'm just sort of dealing with everything.

Again, I'm sorry to everyone that I haven't responded to yet. I am back at work and I seem to be really wiped out half of the time. The fact that it's hot as fuck in Austin is no help. Just riding the bus to work makes me really dizzy and lightheaded. I usually have to sit down for a while at my desk before I can even do the most minimal of tasks.

So I don't have to keep repeating myself. I'm just gonna keep all the health info in these newsletters.

I'm still pretty committed to the idea of not doing any heart surgery, transplant or otherwise. I dunno. I might be in denial. But I don't think so. I have pretty good instincts about these things. I might change my mind if it seems like the only possibility. But right now I'm assuming that won't be the case.

My social worker says I suffer from anxiety depression. It's very possible I've had it in some form for years and long before my heart problems. But the health stuff just brings it to the surface. So I've started seeing a therapist/analyst whatever you call it. Fuck. I really don't know how I'm going to afford

really great...  
(September 13<sup>th</sup>)

#### BACK TO THE HOSPITAL...

As I write this, it's a mere five hours since I got out of another round of surgery. This one was really, really minor. But still costing me a fucking fortune. In fact, all they did was yank out the old tube and stick in a new one. What I'm trying to say is this: I am high as fuck! Yeah, I've still got the anesthetic/pain killer/forget your life stuff still running through my veins and I'm feeling no pain...

What's new? Well, the catheter that I need for my dialysis stopped working so they organized some emergency day surgery to get it sorted. It was a little scary. But not really. In fact, with all the nice treatment and drugs I sort of enjoyed the whole thing. No, I haven't got the bill yet.

Also, Monday was a crazy, crazy day for me. I got the results of my psychiatric exam and my IQ test. I had a meeting with the woman who heads Austin Psychological and she gave me the scoop. I'm fucking nuts! I'm only half joking. I've been diagnosed with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. You know, like Vietnam Vets that freak out and shoot up a shopping mall? That's me. I'm under a ton of stress that stems back decades. Some of it comes from childhood. Some of it comes from living in scary places. Some of it comes from hanging around scary people. Some of it comes from trying to keep a fucking band together. I'm at a point where any yelling kind of freaks me out and sends my blood pressure through the roof.

So now we know. It's very possible that the stress and anxiety shot my blood pressure through the ceiling for years leading to heart and kidney problems. Years of whining band members, record labels, record stores, zine editors, relatives, punkers... You folks are literally killing me...

But not no more. I'm getting help and I will become a boring productive member of society at any moment.

Oh, my IQ? I'm a fucking genius. The shrinks were all really excited that I scored "off the charts" high on almost every part. I'm in the top 4% of the world and that was the conservative estimate...

How do I feel about having a genius IQ? What's the point of having a great brain when your mind is broken?

(September 22<sup>nd</sup>)

#### WHAT'S NEW?

I'll tell you what the fuck is new, I just got out of the hospital AGAIN. Fuck me, right? Man, I think I just bragged a little too much in that last blog and I am paying the price!

So I go home on Saturday after dialysis. It was really weird. I like cold weather. But for some reason I was really cold at dialysis and was shivering. Even the nurse commented on it.

I get home and decide I'm not feeling well enough to go to work. I start feeling really weird. I just wanna chill out, but Liberty takes my temperature and sure enough I've got a fever. She gets in touch with Dr. Simmons and she tells us to get over to the ER.

Yeah, I should have guessed it. My new permacath was FUCKED and I got an infection in the process. Dr. Simmons came down and that was cool. I like her and was glad to bond a little even though I didn't have the nerve to tell her that she had something that looked like chocolate ice cream on her face. You get a little demystified when you start picturing your doctor face first in a bowl of chocolate tofutti. Aw, it was endearing.

I had a blood infection and was pretty quickly admitted. And that's where I was until Thursday! Haven't heard from me in a while? That's why. I was in the hospital with no internet access. I mean, St. David's is pretty nice. I can't complain too much. But it seems like internet is becoming a basic human necessity.

Anyway, there are loads of tests, lots of blood work, a few x-rays and even an ultrasound. I was sick, on the drip and given crazy powerful antibiotics that made me barf (literally).

That Monday, go for dialysis in the hospital. If it all goes well, I can go home. You already know it didn't. An hour into dialysis, I got the chills which quickly became the shivers. Pretty soon my entire body was shaking out of control. It was REALLY scary. It looked like something from an Asian horror film.

Another doctor decided that I simply needed a new and third permacath, so they decided right there in the dialysis center to pull my old one out. THAT was weird. I assumed I'd be all doped up like usual. So I was sort of looking forward to it. Nope. She just cut off the stitches, gave a yank and pulled a fucking disgusting, wet, several foot long tube out of my chest. Totally gross. Didn't hurt. But it felt very, very strange.

They gave me a couple of days to get rid of the infection, which turned out to be pretty benign. After a little rest, they stuck with a new

permacath on Thursday morning. I think I'm acclimating to the painkillers because by that evening, it hurt like a motherfucker. Still hurts now and I can't turn my head to the left...

The good part of all of this is that the ultrasound brought some good news. While I was sitting in bed watching the fucking shithole Chronicles of Narnia for the fourth time, my cardiologist came bursting in. He saw my charts and found that my heart is better. In fact, it's back as normal as it can be! It's fucking unbelievable news. I thought I was dreaming at first. It's no longer dilated and I definitely don't need a defibrillator and I definitely don't need heart surgery. Fucking incredible. He said he was so excited he ran all the way over.

Next stop: kidney transplant.  
(September 29<sup>th</sup>)

#### CUT ME UP

Okay, I have some more surgery coming up next Friday. It's a little scary even if it is day surgery. I need to get a fistula put into my arm. More exactly, the doctors are going to create one out of my veins. They are gonna slice my left forearm open, pull up a vein to the surface and then stitch two of them together to make one bigger vein. Once it heals, this will be my fistula where I will do dialysis from now on.

Why am I doing this? I guess I have to. Permacaths fuck up all the time (as I've learned) and are prone to infections (as I've also learned). So I've got some cutting coming up. What sucks the most is that there is a three month recovery period. I can hopefully still do minor things like type and hopefully play guitar. But for that time I won't be able to lift anything over a couple of pounds and will be whacked out on painkillers.

As unlikely as it is, I still can't help but keep dwelling on the worst case scenario, dead nerve endings. It's possible that if everything fucks up, I'll lose the use of that arm. It's pretty unlikely. But I keep thinking about not being able to type or play guitar or anything. It's scary.

I just need to get through this. The next thing I'll be working towards is a kidney transplant and that's serious surgery.  
(October 13<sup>th</sup>)

#### YOU KNOW WHAT RULES?

VICODIN!!! Vicodin fucking rules. My arm was hurting like mad half an hour ago. Now I'm floating on air. I love Vicodin. I took a four hour nap today and I'm already set to go back to sleep.

Yeah, I had my fistula surgery today. Took a little longer than expected and I was totally out from 9:00 AM until noon. But they wound up cutting a lot less than they thought and had to do a lot less work, which is all good news. But it hurts like fuck so I'm taking pain killers for the first time in my life. I get two Vicodin every four hours. I love it. But I feel like I can't do anything at all...  
(October 20<sup>th</sup>)

#### WHAT'S UP WITH ME?

I'm not sure if I'm frightened or not. But now that my heart has gotten better, I'm starting the long process of getting a kidney transplant. I'm waiting for Thanksgiving to be over to start. I've already had a doctor, a cancer survivor, come by to talk to me about stress. I need to take it slowly because getting a transplant is a very long and frustrating process. Plus, it's going to cost a fortune and my insurance totally sucks. Hopefully Medicare will help out to some extent. I don't know. I really don't know how I'm gonna sort this all out.

So that means I really need a new job. It's been a long time coming. I really hate working at the video store. I was really at a breaking point a few months ago where, though I do like most of our customers, the assholes were driving me to violence. I thought there was something wrong with me. That's when I knew I had to start seeing a shrink. Really, the health problems were a good excuse to make it happen. That's when I was told that I suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. There was a lot of violence in my life from my earliest memories through high school and I've never, ever, ever in my life felt comfortable talking about any of it. So the job, customer service, was just pushing me over the edge even though I was already acting in an unnatural state for decades.

Add that to the fact that it's a job where I've never really felt like I was respected or treated properly, it's time to leave. I've done so much for Vulcan Video, yet have been continuously disrespected in a passive aggressive way over the years; I just can't take it anymore. It's literally killing me. My heart can't take the stress anymore.

I don't get paid anything. In fact, I had to take a pay reduction to keep working. The insurance through Humana is total garbage. It's a shit situation. Trying to find a job while working on getting a transplant is really

stressful. Any dealing with money is a nightmare for me. But I don't see any other solution. Any ideas?

#### BILLS

I've got so much debt, I don't know what to do. Liberty really wants to go back east for the vacation as it's been a tough year. I don't know how I'm gonna afford it. I've gotta get started working on my kidney transplant. So I've got a ton of shit on Ebay at the moment. It's mostly J Church stuff now. I'll keep expanding it as time goes on. Any help would be great. Just search under honeybearrecords.

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#### BILLS

#### HUMANA

I hate Humana. Why do I even have insurance? Why do I even keep my job? It's so fucked. I just found out today that I might not be able to sort out my kidney transplant because Humana won't deal with the Austin transplant clinic. I might have to leave town which can include frequent doctor visits. How the fuck am I gonna afford that? Fucking Humana piece of shit. Fucking crap video store job. It would almost be better if I didn't have insurance at all...

#### SUCKS

#### GOOD RIDDANCE 2006

Well, 2006 has been a fucked up year. It's over. Thank God. This is my last newsletter of the year and I don't even wanna dwell on it. If you care, you already know the stories. If you don't, that's cool too.

In a couple of months I'm going to be 40. I used to think that the end of my 30s would be the end of me playing music. But times change and I always reserve the right to change my mind. I may not want to be on tour for half of the year. I may not want to play every basement in the world and I may not want to visit every Eastern European town. But I still find my inspirations and still like sitting down and writing music whether it's hardcore, power pop, whatever. It's still challenging and rewarding for me.

Here are my goals for 2007. My health is always a factor and in some ways, even more so are my finances. But this is what I would like to accomplish in a perfect world:

1. I would like to have at least 24 new J Church songs written and recorded. That's enough for one album and a bunch of singles. Or it could be two full albums. I don't know. It's a target I think is possible. It's been a long time since "Society Is A Carnivorous Flower" came out and I feel kind of bad about that. "Horror Of Life" was recorded back in February and it still isn't out. I just want the band to be more productive.
2. I would like to get my book done and finished. I should have been done already. But all of this hospital stuff and computer problems have really been a set back. Turns out that's okay as it probably would have been bad if my book, "Let The Tribe Increase" came out around the same time as Ian Glasper's "The Day The Country Died". My book will hopefully come out some time next year on AK Press.
3. I would like to put out the 10<sup>th</sup> issue of my zine and then three more before the year is up. I should have had issue 10 of Some Hope And Some Despair out by now. But, well, you know what happened. In a perfect world, I would like to put the first 10 issues together as a proper bound book. But I need to get the 10<sup>th</sup> issue out before I can do that!
4. I would like to get all the Cringer music available. Even the CDs are out of print now, so I'd like to put together a complete two disc set with everything including some of the stuff that missed the previous CDs.
5. I would like to release at least five different new titles on Honey Bear Records. The two Cringer demo LPs and the new Cilantro 7" won't count as I sent them off a while back to be pressed up. I've still got five more J Church live LPs to release (all fundraisers to help with hospital bills), a lot of unreleased demo material, more Cringer stuff, plus CD collections from Flowers In The Dustbin, Metro Youth/Sanction and Storm The Tower. You have to spend money to make money so I'll try to think of a way to come up with the initial \$\$\$.
6. I would like to do more Cilantro stuff. I don't know if that means more stuff on my tape label, OTP. It might be more vinyl like a third single or a first LP I'm not sure. But I'll be doing something.

#### 7. Well, maybe six is enough for now..

Hope next year is better for everyone out there. I hope to start repaying the many, many people who have been helping me out this year. I'll be back in two weeks.

#### HAPPY 2007

Rabbit rabbit. Okay, that's out of the way...

#### SWEARING ON PLANES

Can you swear on planes? I don't know. It only ever crosses my mind on those holiday flights to and from the East Coast. Everyone is a prick. On our stop over in Houston, some tall, skinny shit bird pushed his way past me in the aisle trying to get off the plane. He pretended not to notice me with his nose buried in a book. Now, I hadn't eaten in several hours and I'm not about to back down from a fight from some "book readin'" type so I make sure he hears me call him an asshole. I was about to launch into a much more predictable volley of the kind of hurtful language I take pleasure in subjecting lesser life forms to. But then it occurred to me; can you swear on a plane? I was with Beck when we almost got thrown off because we "looked" like we were stoned (Beck had a cold). I had another flight to catch and this IS Texas. But the anger had already reached the surface so I sounded like a moron muttering things like "bozo" and "dufus". Then I noticed what was under said asshole's arm; a Green Apple Books bag. If you've ever lived in San Francisco you know that Green Apple Books (and I don't even know if they're still in business) pretty much across the board hired fucking assholes. I think they kind of had a chip on their shoulder as they were a sort of poor man's City Lights, who were the penultimate faux-intellectual Frisco pricks. I didn't know how to react. I gave him a quick kick as we got off the plane.



## FOOD FILMS

I love movies. I could spend my whole life just watching movies. I'm also the kind of guy that can watch a movie over and over. If I like a movie, I'll watch it to death, sometimes several viewings in a single sitting. I'm a little obsessive.

Movies affect me on a lot of different levels. There are the ones that I just love like everyone else. "Bande A Part" is just a great film. "Reds" is like a miracle to me. "Suspiria" is pure art film to me. My top ten films of all time... I mean, it's impossible. It evolves and revolves every day, hour, minute. And as much as I hate, I like a bit of everything. Old or new, comedy, action, low budget, blockbuster... There's no telling what will be great.

But there are other movies that I like for much more personal reasons. Maybe I'm too sentimental. I can love a film like "Death Race 2000" if only because it reminds me of being a kid and discovering my inner nerd. Ditto for "Wizards". Those aren't "great" movies. But I love them and at the time they were as important to me as comic books, Kikaida and hard rock (which is what I was into).

An even more ridiculous sub-category of the sentimental favorites are what I call the "Food Films". I dunno. I can't explain it. Certain movies show food in a way that both enticed and intrigued me. I don't mean the obvious food flicks like "Tampopo", "Eat Drink Man Woman" or "The Big Night" both of which I love. But I like it when it's subtler. It's not the focus of the film or even the scene. But it's presented in a way that is real and sort of comforting to me.

One of my favorite examples is "Saturday Night Fever". I love this movie anyway as a friend of mine from Brooklyn once described it as a sort of a guido cautionary tale. But the sentimental draw for me is the food. When the family sits down to these great meals of pasta and slabs of meat, it's like nothing I had ever seen before growing up in Hawaii. I had no idea that people ate that way. I also had no idea what a White Castle was. Those little burgers looked so good to me as a kid. Even the two slices of pizza at the start looked great all stacked up.

Mob movies tend to be great food films. Obviously, the prison-cooking scene in "Goodfellas" is great as is the first time you see Paulie and the wisequys are all grilling sausage outside. At any moment during "The Godfather" there are a bunch of sweaty guys eating something good.

Wong Kar Wai is always good at making food appealing in his films. But my favorite is the most understated. I love the plate of Char Siu over rice Tony Leung is eating during Chung King Express. I also love the idea that he gets his girlfriend salad or fish and chips or pizza. But gets Chinese bar-b-que pork for himself. I also really like seeing how he eats at home with the instant noodles and fish right out of the can.

"Habit" is a great modern horror film. But I just love watching Larry Fessenden wolfing down a hamburger. He hasn't realized yet that Anna is a vampire, taking his blood. He just finds himself craving red meat.

You know what? The food doesn't even have to be real. It can be future food. One thing that I love about "2001: A Space Odyssey" is that it also shows some of the more mundane events that will still occur in the future. I love seeing the guy trying to figure out the futuristic toilet or phoning home. Anyway, I love when the doctors are first racing to the monolith and have a break of crustless sandwiches and coffee. It's funny to me that such a '50s type of lunch would still happen in the future. I also love watching Dave and Frank eating their futurist food pastes while watching the news. The future looks great to me.

Speaking of sci-fi, I always loved the noodles that Harrison Ford is eating the first time you are introduced to him in "Bladerunner". I like to think that even the most bleak future would have outdoor udon shops.

Sure, this might all be the result of me being crazy and needing to watch films over and over finding new and even less authentic meaning. I doubt that any of those filmmakers gave much thought to the food in their films. Nevertheless, it's becoming its own aesthetic. It just takes someone to find that right adjective to personify it.

## BAISE MOI? BAISE MYSPACE!

Everyone has been talking about MySpace lately. It's good. It's evil. It's pointless. It's useful. I've been trying hard to write something that would add my two cents but have been having a really hard time. It's odd because, right or wrong, my stupid opinions usually flow pretty freely onto paper. But I just can't get to that place. I can't form an organized opinion and I think I know why: I don't really care.

I want to care. I really do. Arguments both for and against are reasonable. I guess it all just seems like a silly distraction to me.

Let me start by saying that I use MySpace all the time. I should just admit that. That doesn't mean that I discount people's criticisms. But I pick and choose my battles like anyone else. I'm not Ted Kozinski. At

the same time, I do understand that MySpace is big business and Rupert Murdoch owns it and he's evil. I get that. When the revolution comes, the paid staff at MySpace will be up against the wall with all the other capitalist running dogs. I'm with you there.

Still, I use MySpace. Yes, it's free and it's a very easy and successful way to get out information about my band, my fanzine, my label... But let's face it: I love the social aspect. I'd be lying if I said my only use for MySpace was re-appropriating their facilities for DIY revolution. No, I like reading Janelle's blog and I like seeing pictures of hardcore bands I've never heard of and, yes, I do want to know how many of your on-line "friends" you've had sex with. I'm not gonna lie. It's a lot of fun and it keeps me out of the bars every night.

For me, MySpace is like basic cable. Of course it's evil. Viacom or whatever the hell it is now? In the immortal words of the Four Skins they're "evil, evil, evil, evil, evil, evil, evil..." I could make up some lie about how shows like "Curb Your Enthusiasm" and "Six Feet Under" are making art out of the vile tendrils of the totalitarian spider plant. But I don't even watch those shows. There's something counter-revolutionary about trying to pass off HBO or Showtime as "art".

Even worse is network TV. I don't have to tell you how evil the networks are. Just pick up any contemporary lefty publication. They can't get over media analysis. All TV is propaganda and the message is from whoever owns the medium. Right now, that's the multi-national corporations who have been our main enemy all along. I don't disagree.

Before I moved to San Francisco, I was living the life. Every other word out of my mouth was either "revolution" or "bourgeois" or something of that aesthetic like "anaesthetized" or whatever. I hadn't even owned a TV in years. If I had nothing to do, I read. If I wanted to see a movie I had to see it in the theater. When people at work talked about pop culture I was happily oblivious and joyously arrogant. Nothing wrong with a little oblivious arrogance from time to time.

I moved to San Francisco in 1989. I moved at that time for two reasons. The first was to help out with the "Without Borders" Anarchist Gathering and that's another story. The second was because there was an open room at the Maximum Rock-N-Roll house and David Hayes turned it down. I think I thought I was moving in with the Baader-Meinhoff and was somewhat disappointed when I found out how normal it all was. I had been to the house before. But it's something else when you live there.

We all worked really hard on the magazine, devoting all of our free time to the voluntary work. Tim Yo was always very, very respectful of that (though he was the first to tear you a new asshole if you slacked... he really lived his Leninist beliefs). We lived in a nice house off of Castro with very cheap rent. We had game nights. We would follow the Giants. We also had a massive TV, the biggest I had ever seen, with every cable channel available.

That TV was like a reward for a long days work and you were sure to find Tim reclined on the couch in front of it every night. After the, at times, intellectually draining work at the magazine, it was nice to just pop on the TV. I think it had something to do with all the compromises you make during the day. It's relaxing just picking whatever you want to watch from 100 different channels. I don't know.

No one at the house had any illusions about what TV was. We weren't idiots. None of us were pretending to be analyzing consumer culture by watching MTV either. I hate those people. The day was over and we watched a little TV to relax. It's like how some people have a beer or smoke a joint first thing when they get home.

I'm not saying that getting into TV was the main thing I took from living at the Maximum house. Far from it. But I have always owned a TV since. I watch TV, drink Diet Pepsi, and play on MySpace, which, to me, are all to varying degrees on the same level of bad behavior. MySpace is like TV and TV is like MySpace, it's free and it can be fun. What's not fun about "Scrubs"?

## WRITING TO BANDS

I miss writing to bands. I miss the excitement of getting a reply. I was so happy the first time Scarred 4 Life got some mail. The same goes for my first zine or when Cringer started. Everyone was so desperate for information that we became comrades in a weird way. I was this insecure little freak meeting other insecure little freaks.

I think that DIY punk rockasauruses have spent too much time with the ambiguous and subjective as far as their search for self-definition. There's been so much time put towards trying to argue out what ideological and/or value system constitutes "DIY punk" that I, personally, find it all really boring. I always have and that's why I think it's more fun to think of the practical parts of DIY culture that nobody believes exists.

There are a few things (that I may write about in more detail in the future) that either you get it or you don't. Do you thrill at the thought of thumbing through 100,000 used LPs in a dusty little record shop? Do you love when you get a letter or parcel in the mail and it's clearly been handwritten? Are you still compelled to the part of the bookstore with the cheap Xeroxed little tomes? You don't necessarily need to ride a bike. You don't need have a backpack. You don't need to be in a band, put on gigs or do a zine. You don't need to be vegan.

Writing to bands is a BIG part of that. Even though I'm at a state where I can think of bands and band-people as my peers or whatever, I can still admire them and get thrilled about writing them. That's probably why I still do a fanzine. Hey, I know the folks in the Pedestrians and Bury the Living. But I like writing to them and getting interviews and finding out what they are up to. I get a thrill from that and I would be lying if I said that it was because I was breaking down the barrier between artist and audience. If that were true I wouldn't be so thrilled.

I remember when I first started writing to bands. Me and my sister got into punk at the same time and were pretty quickly super competitive. There were only a few outlets for punk records in Hawaii and I remember when the local Revolution Books got a Black Flag t-shirt for sale. We both literally raced to the store and even though the shirt was three times too big, she got it. The same went for buying records. I hope to write a whole different story about my genesis as record collector, but part of the competition with my sister (and the other few punks in Hawaii in the late '70s and early '80s) was the fact that places like Odyssey Records and DJ's Sound City would usually only get once copy of any even vaguely underground title. That's assuming they bothered to get any copies at all. So we would race out on the weekends or after school to see who could get prize copies of Jam 7's and PiL albums first.

When hardcore came along it immediately felt different from normal punk. First of all, you had groups that seemed to truly have no idea about what they were doing. Even with all they were saying, you still felt like the first wave of punk was as alien and confusing as the mainstream rock bands. Especially in Hawaii where you didn't have touring bands coming through, we still had no idea how it happened. It all seemed like magic. But something about the hardcore bands seemed more relatable. I think the first one I noticed was the Circle Jerks. I remember when "Group Sex" came out thinking that it sounded like a big mistake. But that was weirdly comforting. It felt like the kind of mistake that me and my friends might make. They had no idea how fast or slow songs were supposed to be. They had no idea how long an album was supposed to be. They didn't know any of the rules of rock (or punk for that matter). But they still went ahead fearlessly.

Somehow in my mind that translated to them being on my level: someone I could contact. It didn't happen overnight. I got really into punk rock and those origins are another story. It wasn't until I discovered the Germs that I wanted to know what was up. I remember being fascinated with album inserts even if they were catalogs. My copy of the Germs album came with a mail-order catalog from Slash Records. Along with the shirts and records, they also offered a Germs press kit. I really had no idea what that was. But if it was a collection of magazine clippings, I needed it. I would read every rock magazine available to get whatever info I could, and my bedroom wall was plastered top to bottom with clippings.

I figured it would be rude to just send some money, so I wrote a little letter to Slash thinking that nobody would read it anyway. I just asked a few questions about the Germs and the symbol just to make small talk. When the parcel arrived from California, I was blown away to find that along with a stack of Germs news clippings, I got an actual letter from Pat Smear. It was nice and handwritten explaining that the Germs symbol had some Indian meaning about the circle of life.

From that moment on I was hooked. I know that being from Hawaii probably had some advantages. I'm sure a lot of the bands couldn't believe that they were even selling records in the 50<sup>th</sup> State. It was probably a bit of a feather in their cap. But that was fine with me. The more I wrote to bands, the more I felt connected to them. I began to regularly correspond with bands and people around the world. When I started my first band, I started sending practice tapes to everyone I could think of. That got me into tape trading. It really didn't matter what kind of music it was. It was just exciting to know what was happening around the world and places I never expected

to ever see. When the RRadical "P.E.A.C.E." double album came out, I was writing to half of the bands. Even though the music, at the time, was totally absurd to me, I could really appreciate the letters, tapes and flyers I would get from bands like Mob 47, Pandemonium and even Crass.

I think that this inclination and love of writing and receiving letters helped prime me for when I finally did come across Maximum Rock N Roll. I bought the Dicks issue from Revolution Books the moment they got it. Like I said, I would read anything to do with rock from Song Hits to Trouser Press, so a magazine totally dedicated to punk was a dream. I loved Flipside. But there was something sort of scary about that scene. It was cool. But it seemed so dangerous for some stupid reason. Keep in mind I was 14 years old.

Even though everyone derides the scene reports nowadays, at the time everyone loved them. They were incredible. I couldn't believe that people would actually think to list addresses to write to. For a lonely and alienated kid, it was an invitation to make hundreds of new friends without to awkward social interaction! It was just a matter of time before I was writing scene reports for Maximum (issue 24 if you're curious).

I hated being a teen and I hated where I was. I hated my hometown and I think that those feelings are proof enough that you can actually think globally and fuck off locally. Working on your hometown scene is great. But it's not a rule. You can equally hate everything about it. Writing to bands and people everywhere is more than just a first step to questioning authority and reality.

#### MILESTONES

Tamara Dobson (May 1947 – October 2006)

When I was in grade school, my sister and I would spend weekends with my Dad. While not the closest of family ties, I do have great memories of spending all of our time watching movies. At first it was probably a way to kill a weekend with as little talking as possible. But I grew to love these weekends. We would literally see every Golden Harvest or Shaw Brothers movie to play near Hotel Street. The same theaters would also specialize in blaxploitation films. I saw them all. If it came to Hawaii between '70 and '75 I probably saw it. Same goes for horror films.



To most people Tamara Dobson is just a lesser known b-movie star. But for me, she was one of many superstars. "Cleopatra Jones" is a classic blaxploitation flick that was copied over and over again and even an equally great sequel with "Cleopatra Jones and the Casino of Gold". Both of these movies were totally ridiculous, of course and I don't want to think too much about the Mi Ling or the Dragon Lady. But I was hitting these movies at the perfect age to enjoy their silly escapism.

Tamara Dobson died of pneumonia and multiple sclerosis.

Lou Gish (1967 - 2006)

Like most people who know the name, I mostly was aware of Lou Gish from her role as Julia on "Coupling". One of the best BBC comedies ever, she was a great addition during the second and third season. Her character was so funny and different I was really sad that she left the show rather than become a permanent cast member.

Daughter of Sheila Gish ("Mansfield Park") and Roland Curram ("Darling"), she came from an acting family. Sister Kay Curram also acts and her stepfather was Denis Lawson (Wedge from the original "Star Wars" trilogy!). Her cousin was Ewan McGregor and to top it off, her godparents were Julie Christie and John Schlesinger.

Doing more stage work than anything else, she had been working on "King Lear" with her sister in 2005, working through the death of her mother, Sheila, from facial cancer. During production, Gish's own cancer resurfaced and she was forced to leave the play. She passed away in February of this year.

Grant McLennan (1958 – 2006)

The Go-Betweens were the kind of band that inspired the right people to get involved in music. It may not have been their intention. But they were an inspiration to those who would prefer artistic and intellectual pursuits in music rather than entertainment and financial gain. Not that they wouldn't have loved to have had a Top Ten hit. But commercial trends never affected the band and they put out beautiful record after beautiful record in the face

of such adversity.

Starting off as a Velvet's meets Saints meets not-really-like-that-at-all sort of band in the early '80s, Grant McLennan and Robert Forster started the Go-Betweens while at college in Brisbane, Australia (Security City to Saints fans). While punk may have been their mode at the start, the main themes were much more melodic and almost psychedelic in their pop sensibilities. Over that unforgiving decade of largely unlistenable music, the group managed six fantastic albums mining in many different areas of intelligent pop. A Go-Betweens song can make the Smiths seem illiterate.

Despite the critical success and a hardcore cult following, the band never did break through commercially and were done before the end of the decade. The '90s saw McLennan still busy producing four great solo offerings (one a double LP) as well as a one-off Go-Betweens reunion tour. Surely that and his prolific nature led to the group's 2000 permanent reunion. Four LPs were to follow. While they didn't quite pick up where 1988's "16 Lovers Lane" left off, they were still very much so Go-Betweens records and made sense in the overall catalog.

McLennan died early in May at home of a heart attack.

#### Buck O'Neil (November 1911 – October 2006)

Half of me always thought Buck O'Neil would live forever. The other half thought he must have already been 200 years old. Twice a batting champion in the Negro Leagues, he was colleagues with the legendary Satchel Paige. He also managed the Washington Monarchs to the pennant eventually becoming the first African-American to coach a Major League team when he was hired by the Chicago Cubs in 1962.

On top of that, he was really one of the good guys. Warm and intelligent, he exemplified the fundamentals of baseball both on and off the diamond. If you have any question about this, go back and watch Ken Burns' Baseball series. The interviews with O'Neil are heartwarming.

Admitted to a hospital with extreme fatigue, he passed away with no cause of death given.

#### Adrienne Shelly (1966 - 2006)

You don't have to love Hal Hartley (and I feel mostly ambivalent about his movies) to love Adrienne Shelly. The totally compelling star of "Trust" and "The Unbelievable Truth", I remember thinking that it was obvious that if she chose to go the Hollywood route, she had the charisma for commercial stardom. Turns out that she had a lot more character than that. Over the next 15 years she largely picked interesting roles in film and stage. Eventually she turned to writing and directing.

Her latest film, a comedy titled "Waitress" with Keri Russell, Jeremy Sisto and Cheryl Hines had just finished shooting.

Shelly was found dead in her office Wednesday afternoon.

#### 2005 "CRUEL STORY OF YOUTH" JAPAN TOUR DIARY MAY 24<sup>th</sup> – Austin/Houston (departures)

Another auspicious beginning to a tour; after flying from Austin to Houston, our next flight is delayed for five hours due to engine trouble. I hate flying. I really don't like being up in those air coffins. But it's a necessary anxiety I've learned to live with. The only way I face it is like going in for surgery. I just want to get it over with. I sort of feel that way about most things in my life. So, as Tom Petty so astutely noted, the waiting is the hardest part. Not to mention that this wait in particular only served to point out that the George Bush International Airport has about as much character as the man it was named for. Veggie noodles from Panda Express are functionally good in any city. I used to love their logo, with the panda bear drinking a soda with a straw. I wonder why they changed it?

#### MAY 25<sup>th</sup> – Tokyo (arrivals)

Immigration just waves us through. I think they feel bad that our plane was delayed. The girl at customs just asks me where I got my necklace. Thank fucking God. Next to flying, I hate crossing borders the most. It must say something about me that I've chosen a lifestyle that forces me to do things I completely dread on a regular basis. How many flights have I taken and how many borders have I crossed since starting to play music?

We change some money, eat some musubi, and then get the train to Tokyo where Yoichi meets us at Ueno Station. We're running around trying to catch the connecting train to get to Shimokitazawa where he lives. Japan is always about running around especially when you're trying to work out the complicated train system that actually makes a lot of sense if you analyze it. But with all the running around we're already blown away by the lights, sights and sounds.

Yoichi's place is the second apartment of his I've been to in something like 10 years of coming to tour Japan. I sort of think of Shimokitazawa as the Gypsy Hill of Tokyo. Eating food from the Family Mart is like getting breakfast at the beloved Gypsy Rose Café. At Yoichi's place, he's got some homemade hummus and guacamole. Kaori comes over with some beers and we have a little reunion.

#### MAY 26<sup>th</sup> – Tokyo/Yokohama

We do the tourist thing with Kaori walking around Shimo. Everything is so fucking cool I just wanna buy it all. Of course, everything is also crazy expensive and even though I saved a lot for this trip, I'm still on a serious budget. Village Vanguard Books has a million cool things I wanna buy for Liberty. I settle on "Brown Diary", a photo book of a teddy bear's travels. I get myself a Japanese edition of a Gorey book.

Yokohama is an hours drive from Tokyo and we arrive just as Hard Skin show up. A quick sound check and it's already a lot of fun. It's funny. Between me, Yoichi and Sean and Ben from the Skin, we've all known each other for over a decade. But this is probably only the second time that all of us have been in the same place. I think the last time was when we toured the UK with the Urchin five years ago. J Church with Sean head over to Disc Union. I guy a crazy Mingus triple LP box set and a new copy of the Stalin photo book Timmy, uh, permanently borrowed from me. That boy owes me some records!

The show is packed. Zero Fast are great. We played with them last time. They were a little subdued this time around. But it was still great catchy punk. I got a copy of their new CD single. The Havenot's are fucking amazing. Ripping and catchy punk rock that is really a live thing. They're one of those Japanese bands that really look like a band. Of course Hard Skin are great. This is, what, the fourth or fifth time I've seen them. The new songs come off great live. I love the new album. But especially in this audience those songs come across as strong as the first LP tracks.

They're probably one of if not the hardest band we've ever had to play after. How do you go on after the greatest Oi! band of all time? Lucky for us, this is Japan and the only place where a band like us gets to play after otherwise huge bands like Propagandhi, Hi-Standard, etc. The generous crowd is really up for it and we get two encores that actually feel like encores and not just pity. I grab some Soba noodles from the mini-mart and we're asleep before midnight. Rock-n-roll!

#### MAY 27<sup>th</sup> – Tokyo

We all got up around 8:00 AM. We checked out a little more of Shimo (as I've taken to calling Shimokitazawa as I am in essence a lazy American). I wound up getting a second Stalin book. This one comes with a manga about the band and a DVD! Were these guys some sort of superstars over here? I loved them. But I never knew just how popular they were. It makes me feel really happy for some reason. Someone told us that "emo" in Japanese means "potato", as in "sweet emo" or "potato-core".



Tonight's gig is in Shinjuku, so Sean and I have some shopping to do. We start with Base and Boy. Kaori takes me by the offices of Doll Magazine so I can get a copy of the latest issue. They ran my Antisect article that was originally in MRR. I know that it's not a cool fanzine or anything. But I've always dug Doll, I know. I'm probably being lame and exoticizing Japanese punk and hardcore like Maximum has been doing lately. I have to admit I was a little psyched to see my name as a writing credit in the magazine.

Most of the others go sightseeing with one of the guys from Paintbox. But Sean and I are on a mission and the next few hours are spent thumbing through mile after glorious mile of vinyl. The greatest find of the day was a Japanese edition of the first Crass 7" on Rough Trade. I was expecting to pay up to \$100. But it was about a third of the price. I think they only other time I've seen this record was in Sean's collection. Now I've got the Japanese editions of "Reality Asylum" and "Penis Envy". I wonder what the story was with these records? Record shopping in Shinjuku is a very, very painful experience. I could easily spend \$20,000 in a day walking around here...

Kaori's band, the Happening, are first on benefiting from an excellent new drummer. With her best band yet, it turns out the bassist is quitting tonight to pursue professional surfing. Who does that? People in Japan I guess. The Urchin are Japan's best kept secret. They are so gifted and every song is a pop masterpiece. In their latest incarnation, they even have adopted moments of hardcore, Oi! and early '90s style pop punk. The band is well practiced and, man, they can play. I picked up their new CDEP and it's fucking amazing. Every song is perfect.

Tonight is the best I've ever seen Hard Skin. The sound is amazing and they're actually pretty tight. These guys are some of my closest friends, so it's great seeing them either way. But it's a bonus that they play some of the best music in the world. I know this all started as a joke band. To a certain degree that is still very much the case. But I maintain that I can't think of a better Oi! band ever. No group has been so consistently excellent. Ben is a very underrated songwriter and Hard Skin are like his revenge on anyone who ignored Thatcher On Acid.

Our set is a perfect mirror of the last time we hit Tokyo. This may be my favorite place in the world. The sound is excellent. The crowd is fanatical. It's a lot of fun. Even Ben admitted to Sean he thought we were great. I think we were all bummed that these were the only two dates we had together on this tour. We went out for a late night meal typical of this type of situation where the food and drinks come out in various rounds. I wish every night was like tonight.

#### MAY 28<sup>th</sup> – Sendai

This is our third time at this place. It's basically a practice space that's been converted into a little underground venue. The stage is low and the crowds are pretty crazy. Last time we were here I chipped a tooth when a stage diver hit the mic into my mouth. It was a harmless accident and I've probably chipped my teeth half a dozen times at shows over the years. It's just one of those hardcore hazards.

Anyway, the kids doing the shows here are really cool. They're like second-generation Snuffy Smiles types. Their fucking production company is called My Favorite Place. Wow. I really don't know how to respond to that sort of thing. It's like people with J Church tattoos or bands covering our songs. It's very, very flattering and I like to think I face everything with humility.

Tonight's show is a nice change of pace from the normal pop punk groups we like playing with over here. The End are first up and are pretty great. Very much in the Jehu/Hot Snakes mold with elements of No Means No as well. It's not really prog or math. But it's some sort of weird punk / art hybrid. If you know what kind of music I'm referring to, they're very structuralist in a way. I dig it. But I don't know if they dig this scene.

Total Fury are fucking amazing. That album was the closest any modern hardcore band has come to capturing the feel of Minor Threat/Teen

Idles. Old school, DC-Style hardcore, they're far more powerful live than on record with the group never letting up. It's all at lightning speed as the singer flies around and the bassist lunges to keep time. The guitarist looks young as hell. He really, really has that Lyle Pressler sound down and that is a lot of why the band is so great sounding. After the set, the bassist goes backstage and passes out at the table.

We played with a totally different incarnation of Deeds Not Words last time. I think they used to have a girl singer. The new group is closer to the Fifteen vein I think they aspire towards. It's catchy and they change in all the right places. Actually, it's probably more like later Crimpshrine than Fifteen. Glad to see that influence across the Pacific.

The Urchin are amazing and are easily the best and most together band of the night. They are sounding bigger and fuller than I've heard them sound. We get up and slop through our set, me breaking a string AND a guitar before our set is done. By the end, I'm working through our set playing the Total Fury guy's guitar.

We all stay with Takeshi from the anarcho band Sacrifice. He informs us that his apartment building is the number one suicide spot in Sendai. It's pretty high and looks like a cross between Chungking Manor and a London tower block. I guess everyone living here is really poor. We have a really cool chat and I get a copy of the It's You 7" off of him.

#### MAY 29<sup>th</sup> – Niigata (Nile Studio)

Today was a long drive. I like these long drives. I don't know any better way to feel like you know a place than spending the time actually criss-crossing close to the land. This drive is hot and sweaty. We pass through miles of rice paddies. The flat land is carved every half-mile or so with small cemeteries with 20 or so plots. They're totally compact and weirdly unique like a bigger version of stacking stones along the side of the road. Even in death Americans seem so much more gluttonous and gauche than the rest of the world.

Tonight's show is in the basement of a rundown hotel. It's not really what I think of when I hear "hotel". It looks like a big abandoned building that's been allowed to deteriorate over the years. But the room itself is pretty nice.

The Urchin is playing second out of four. It always feels weird when the band you're touring with doesn't play directly before you. I know there are always reasons. But I sort of feel like I'm betraying them in some way. I suppose that part of it is the camaraderie you develop on the road. But part of it is also that they are making sacrifices to make this tour for us happen. We are using their back-line and they don't have to help us at all. I just want to do right by them.

Spraypaint are sandwiched between us. They do an amazing cover of "I Want The Moon". They're a pretty remarkable band. It's really hard to pin this kind of band down. There are raw punk elements mixed with melodic arrangements. It's like if you took I Excuse and replaced the hardcore sensibilities with garage or more traditional punk.

We're just a pile of crap. No sleep and general fatigue complicate an already difficult gig. Everything sounds out of tune and dead. The room is so big I can't get a guitar note to sustain to save my life. The cacophony makes singing a battle and rather than rise to the occasion, the whole gig slips away from us and ends in a dreadful thud.

We stay with the singer for Spraypaint. But not for long as he has to go to work at 6:00 AM! The little things that would kind of get on my nerves on any other tour are fine in Japan. I'm always tired here anyway. Besides, it's tour. I remember the first interview I ever read with Husker Du talking about getting used to going for days on the road with no sleep at all. They would just hit it and do what they had to do. I still find that totally exciting. I don't like sleep anyway. I talk with Masa and Big from the Urchin about old shows I used to love like Kikaida, Kamen Raider V3 and Zaboga. One of my favorites was Rainbow Man but you never hear about him. There



hasn't been the big revival like there has been for so many other Japanese superhero shows from the '70s. Big told me it's because the bad guys he fights were made to look like North Koreans! He says it's not politically appropriate to celebrate the show at this time. As a child in Hawaii watching every week and buying the toys. I had no idea.

#### MAY 30<sup>th</sup> – Kyoto (Kyamachi East)

It's another long drive starting at 6:00 AM. These little cemeteries that I thought seemed so sentimental yesterday are a real drag today. I guess a big America type graveyard is sort of desensitizing in its volume. You just see acres of death like a grim patch board. It's a number we can't truly understand and therefore just becomes it's own entities. It's the dead masses. All these little ones seem more personal like little mirrors from the horror of life to the alienation of death. The dead here are constantly in your life and you can never be sure if you are meant to remember them out of respect or that of your own reasons for existence.

Everyone except for me went to the hot springs. I really wanted to go but I can't because of my heart condition. You always hear about these places and how refreshing they are. It's just one more thing I can't do because of my decaying material self. I just sat on my own pondering the little graveyards while soaking my feet in the hot spring water.

I really enjoy walking around Kyoto. It's a crazy indoor/outdoor mall downtown with loads of cool shops. Yeah, I guess if you live here it's probably the equivalent of cruising around Haight Street or Melrose or some bullshit. But I'm a tourist and I AM looking for another 100 yen store. In fact, those stores bring me great joy! I know it's their version of a dollar store. But, hey, I used to love hitting up the dollar stores in Los Angeles and San Francisco when I was still a Californian. Anyway, my main purchase of the day turned out to be at a Tower Records where I was able to track down the soundtrack to "Ping Pong".

There's no ego in the hardcore scene here. I Excuse are one of the better known bands and have certainly paid their dues. Still, they are happy to go on first at a show that they set up. Paired down to a trio, they are one of the greatest hardcore bands in Japan with a mesmerizing mix of strained vocals and noisy but complex guitar playing. I can't wait until they get a third full length together.

Anti-Justice are another Kyoto punk band that are more goofie with a singer playing an unplugged acoustic guitar. Every song is catchy as hell and seems to be built around at least one sing-a-long moment. The singer has a sort of Dean Martin on a Sunday look and they seem to be really funny as everyone that speaks Japanese is laughing at the between song yucks.

But tonight is the Urchin's night as the crowd is totally up for it. In this very tiny room, they explode with the crowd surging and a collapsing around them. They also seem to be especially enjoying themselves tonight.

It's even a nice set for us. Thank God, as we really needed some sort of redemption after the crap we played last night. Sometimes on tour you can hit a bad patch like a baseball team in a slump. We're only here for a week or so. Hitting a slump is not an option. We power through the bad memories of the previous night and in our own mundane way, rise to the occasion.

We crash at I Excuse's house tonight. I got a tape of some new stuff that I can't wait to check out. I love these guys.

#### MAY 31<sup>st</sup> – Nagoya (Huck Finn)

I love Nagoya. We spill out of the van and I don't think I'm the only one in a weird state of mind. This tour is probably easier on me than on anyone else. First off, I'm from the States so we do these long drives between shows all the time. I've probably done over a hundred six to ten hour drives in my life. It's no big deal. I don't think that's nearly as common for the Japanese. On the other hand, I'm Asian meaning I'm not exactly the tallest guy around. At 5' 5" I have no trouble fitting into the little Japanese vehicles. In fact, I think American trucks and cars are stupid big. But I think Ben and Chris suffer every drive. I'm still in a weird state of mind and I go off by myself for a little bit just taking a lot of random photos of the city.

I love Answer Records. It seems like there is a cool record shop in every major stop. I don't know how they do it. American punk stores last for a few years and that's it. Something about the lifestyle versus the discipline it takes to run a successful record shop doesn't mesh in the States. Over here, it's just so impressive. Answer is just one shop that's been around forever and is still great.

I love the Daiei. I remember going to the Daiei at the Pearlridge in Hawaii to buy Blondie records. It seems like every time I've been to Nagoya (which is pretty much every time J Church has been to Japan) we hit the

Daiei near Huck Finn for food and drinks.

I really love Huck Finn. Since last time, the club has been renovated with an upstairs bar. We've had a lot of fun nights here.

I get to catch up a bit with Taylor from the Genbaku Onanies and his wife Kanako. Kanako used to do Japan's best Morrissey/Smiths fanzine and Genbaku Onanies are one of the countries best, longest lasting punk bands going back to the late '70s.

First up tonight are Navel. This is easily the best time I've ever seen them. They are also some of the nicest guys around. They have that guitar sounds that mixes Husker Du with Les Thugs. It's that open chord, almost folk type guitar playing with layers of distortion. Every song seems to have a well thought-out blueprint. I can't wait to hear the newest record.

The Act We Act have, in fact, nothing to do with "Copper Blue". They are a thrash band of sorts, I guess it's what the kids these days think of as screamo. Not totally though as they've probably got more in common with the first Melt Banana recordings or even Violent Onsongeisha more so than the Locust or something like that. Again, it's an ice change of pace to have a band here and there playing something other than melodic punk. I wish more shows crossed genres.

Mass is drunk and the Urchin are fast and loose. He usually seems so reserved it's great to see him yelling and flipping off the crowd. The kids in Nagoya are always way up for it. It reminds me of the first couple of times we ever made it to Torino or Leeds or Chicago.

Our set is chaos. More busted strings. Crazy crowd. I never break strings. What is going on? It's totally crazy. People are flying everywhere. At one point, the drummer from Navel does a stageline. I think he hurt his head or something. It was freaky. He looked okay but said he felt terrible. Eventually he had to leave by ambulance. I'd never seen one here in Japan before. It looked like some futuristic little white vehicle with another of the many Japanese robotic voices you hear everywhere. Two people hopped out with a strange, hydraulic stretcher. They were wearing all white with masks looking like the cover of that George Romero movie. It was like they were looking for biohazard or something.

#### JUNE 1<sup>st</sup> – Mie, Ise (Question)

We drove all night to Ise after the gig at Huck Finn. We're staying with folks from the Because. They seem to live in this weird little apartment structure that I can't figure out if it has a shower or not. There doesn't seem to be. It's funny how so much of this country seems so futuristic and then you find places with no individual showers and nobody seems to have AC this hot summer. But its fucking Japan and the good will always outweigh the not so good.

I don't know much about Shinto. I probably know as little about it as I do about most religions. I didn't grow up with any kind of religious dogma, but I did have a lot of friends that were Japanese Shinto. I mention this because we spend the day in Jingu where there is a famous Shinto Temple. But in my context, I just felt like a tourist. I don't get very excited about religion, but it was interesting. After walking down a little drag of gift shops and ice cream vendors, we get to the Uji Bridge. This Japanese style bridge is flanked by what look like some sort of ornamental designs but are actually just there to keep away debris in the water. On the other side we start marching through a small segment of the forest of Jingu. I can see how this would be really beautiful, but with the hundreds of Japanese tourists, it is more like a ritual where we are the only total outsiders. Many old folks are making the walk in what seems to be their best suits and dresses. There are deer roaming around freely. I think they're sacred or something (I'm probably saying something totally blasphemous and not knowing it) so they're pretty acclimated to people. There is also a Karp pond that is sort of weird. Chris reaches down and starts petting the Karp. It's hard to imagine why the fish would enjoy that. We make our way up to Geku, 1500 year old sanctuary for priests. Everybody is making their way up to do their business. Yoichi warns us that we can't take any photos and that it is a very sacred place. Just as he says this he drops his can of beer.

Question is a ridiculous venue. It's cool. But it's funny. The room can probably only fit 50 or so people. But the sound system is as big as the outdoor room at Emo's. Along with records and shirts, there is a stall for free veggie curry. Man, I love Japanese curry. I make it all the time back home. This might be my favorite meal so far.

Meltlee is the first band on. I never know if these names are rough interpretations of something English or phonetic versions of Japanese words. I'm not sure what Meltlee is about. But they are a solid melodic punk band that are more in the tradition of older UK pop punk like Mega City 4 or the early Birdland records. They do like their big endings.

This is our first night with the Because and they are amazing. They seem to explode onstage. The songs are catchy without relying on

pop progressions. The bass is thunderous while the two guitars chime out patterns, neither one especially lead or rhythm. We're doing the rest of the tour with them and it's gonna be cool.

Drift Age are up next and are also gonna do the rest of the tour with us. I vaguely remember playing with them a year or so ago. I remember thinking they were pretty good. But I mostly remember finding their stickers in everything I own up to six months after coming home. Tonight they are great. Their bass player really goes for it putting his whole body into every song. It's funny how melodic punk in Japan has sort of taken a stylistic turn and becomes its own sound. I don't totally know how to explain it. But it has a lot to do with guitar tones. Whatever it is, it really does unite otherwise drastically different bands like The Because, Drift Age, I Excuse and others.

It's our last night with the Urchin, which is sad. I love these guys and I like playing with them. We've toured with them in England, played with them in San Francisco, now we've done Japan with them. Hopefully they will come to the States next time.

Our set is sort of funny. I liked it. I think we're at that stage that I love in a tour where everything is like a machine. Having that confidence gives us leeway to do other things in the set. It's my favorite thing about touring. Ben is sort of having a weird night. I'm just going to assume that it's burnout as he goes off on an angry tangent from the stage because a dude in the audience is wearing sunglasses. I dunno. I don't wear sunglasses indoors. But I don't care either. Ben was pissed and kept calling the guy "Joe Cool" like Snoopy. It was actually pretty funny.

After the gig, we pack up and drive some more. It's back to the Navel house, which is big, clean and has heated carpet. Not that we've needed heating lately. I am utterly filthy and exhausted.

#### JUNE 2<sup>nd</sup> – Ehime, Matsuyama (Hoshizora Jet)

Jet is a cool club. We played here last time, too. This is the club that is either owned by or is somehow connected to Guitar Wolf. So, it's a little sad being here just a few weeks after the bass player passed.

Yumi, the old drummer for Minority Blues Band, came out tonight. It was really great seeing her again. It's funny. She was so quiet and shy with that band. But tonight she is friendly, talkative, and has actually learned a fair amount of English. She is really cool. I wish that band was still playing.

Drift Age and The Because are ripping it up tonight. Last night was a lot of fun. But with all the running around, I think a good rest has got everyone more in the playing mode tonight. I know I was feeling a little beaten by the sun and curry yesterday. Add that to the higher level of performances from the Japanese bands and we were going for it a lot more tonight. Man, these Japanese tours are so short. By the time we are really hitting our stride, you realize that you've only got a couple of more shows to go.

We stay with the singer from Drift Age. He's a really cool guitar player. He reminds me of a gunslinger up there. He's got that confident stance with his axe riding the hip. There aren't too many guitar players like that. Mick Jones did that sometimes. I think I remember Sonic Smith did it sometimes too. It's cool.

#### JUNE 3<sup>rd</sup> – Tokushima (Crowbar)

Tokushima is a weird little town. I'm sure there's cool shit to do. But I've never found it. There's a little mall that is fairly deserted even on a Friday. Everything seems to be closing down. Still, I'm an ignorant American and enjoy pondering the many shops and bakeries near the club.

The club we're playing at tonight is a cool new place where Tomo from I Excuse works. I'm not totally sure who does what. But he seems to be some sort of stage manager. George, who played bass in Minority Blues Band tends bar. It's a pretty cool atmosphere. It's a nice clean place with a room to crash upstairs. Euro style.

It's a little weird tonight as all three ex-members of Minority Blues Band are at the show. They didn't seem to be talking to each other. I guess the break up was pretty bad. Nobody wants to go into the specifics of why they split. Actually, Yumi and George seem to get along. That's just another piece of the puzzle. Spalding looked like he was there to sell me an insurance policy. He said he was getting together a new band more in the style of Jets To Brazil. I'm not totally sure if that's a good or a bad thing. I'll wait and see. Regardless of the situation, I really like all three of them and was very happy to see them all.

Tomo and George have a new band together called Kiss Of Love. Knowing those two, I knew I was gonna love this band live. They definitely play at the breakneck pace that Tomo is most comfortable with mixing it with a lot of melody. I guess that's been part of the overall sound in the Snuffy Smile world. Giving the band even more character is a crazy (in the good way) girl singer. She jumps around and flops back and forth both crazed and engaged. I can't wait until this band gets something on record.

Drift Age and the Because are both really hot tonight. They both benefit greatly from the good sounding PA in this little punk club. It's a real smooth show as we are really gelling at the moment as well. I can't believe the tour is almost over. We try to stay up and party for a while. But eventually I start feeling the life drain out of me and I hit the sleeping room upstairs. I love being able to go straight upstairs from the gig. It's like when a European squat gig is really good.

JUNE 4<sup>th</sup> – Osaka (Saomai)  
Visiting Time Bomb Records is always a painful experience for me. There are about a million things worth getting and all just a few thousand yen more than I care to spend. How many Stalin books do I need (considering I can't actually read any of them). So many 7's that I never knew existed. So much Japanese

hardcore on vinyl. It's all too much.

We didn't come to Osaka on our last trip to Japan. Our shows here have been pretty hit-or-miss as far as turnouts. I'll be the first to admit that I'm usually a little disappointed with our shows here. I don't know why. I'm usually happy just to be in Japan. It's just that Osaka is so big and probably the second most famous city in Japan that I have higher expectations. Hey, it's raining too. Awesome.

There are a couple of cool shops near the venue. Since I didn't blow my wad on records, I can at least check out some cool little Godzillas. With "Godzilla: Final Wars" being out over here, there's been a lot of cool promo stuff including reissues of all the different Godzillas in miniature form. I got the one from "Godzilla Vs. The Smog Monster" which is probably my favorite. I also check out a used book store which has loads of porn (as seems to be the case everywhere here) but there are also some cool photo books. I get a book about current criminals at large. Sort of their equivalent of America's Most Wanted. Interesting pictures. Now I'm officially broke.

I spend a little too much time dawdling. I keep forgetting how early shows start here. When I walk in, I Excuse are just starting up. Tonight is our last night with them, which is a shame. I really like these guys and I think they are excellent as a trio. I wish we could do more stuff with them. To be honest, I feel that way with all the bands we meet here. I don't want to stop hanging out with the Because or Drift Age or the Urchin for that matter.

If touring with the Urchin was the "pop" part of the tour, the later half with the Because and Drift Age is the "rock". The Because are just a huge wall of amazing sound with implied melody and complexity not unlike what Husker Du was like live. You can hear the melodic essence. But there's this amazing wall of sound propelling the whole thing. In some ways they remind me of Fuel or Pitchfork live.

A lot of the same can be said for Drift Age though they focus a lot more on a raw energy that comes from being totally synched. Man, that bass player pounds the strings with his whole body lunging into the beat. Between the two bands, a lot of strings get broken which says a lot. I play



very hard (that's not just talk) and I rarely even change my strings.

The little room is packed and Chris is really going off tonight. It's hot as fuck and cramped as hell, which sounds horrible. But for our kind of band, it's a totally ideal situation and it seems like Chris is really feeling it. I like playing in the band and I have a certain amount of confidence. But tonight is one of those nights where I feel like, shit, we really are a fucking good live band. It felt like 1997, which is a really dumb thing to say.

My pal Hiroko was at the show. She was going to be hanging out with us after the show. I think she was maybe planning on crashing wherever we crashed. But the plans changed and we ended up driving back to Nagoya that night. It would have been nice to really hang out, but we at least got to catch up over some late night noodles before hitting the road. That's sort of what tour is all about. You might get to see most of your friends for not nearly enough time.

JUNE 5<sup>th</sup> – Hachioji, Tokyo  
(Match Vox)

Ah, it just feels like it's already over. We've got a big Tokyo show. But it all just feels like it's over. It's a little sad. At the end of a tour like this you really never know if you're ever going to make it back. Will we ever get back to Tokyo? Will we ever get back to London? Will we ever get back to New York? You might think, of course, J Church will defo go back to those cities. But who knows? I could always die. We could put out a real shit record universally despised. I don't know which would be worse.

Brown Trout are on first. Fuck me, are there any bad bands in Japan? I don't get it. Really amazing sound with a deep Huskers meets Moving Targets thing going on. You can't fucking beat that especially when you see the giant stage and massive sound system. Totally incredible.

We finally get to see the notorious Blotto. It's like the capital of Japan is Emeryville, because this four-piece exemplify everything we know and love about the old Bay Area pop punk sound. They're great. They kind of out-Crimpshrine Crimpshrine if you can believe it. They even do an old Cringer cover that sort of freaks me out. I mean, we could never actually play that song live...

I had been making fun of Peace of Bread's name ever since I heard we were playing with them. I mean, it almost makes sense. Right? C'mon, don't make me over explain it! They're called Peace of Bread for fuck's sake! So I felt like a dick when they turned out to be totally fucking amazing! Featuring possibly the tiniest girl in the world playing bass, every song was a perfectly harmonized pop masterpiece. They were so perfect you just want to give them a hug (and I don't hug). I can't wait to hear their single.

I'm really gonna miss Drift Age and the Because. Both bands were really great every night. Plus I had a great time hanging out with them. It's hard to really connect with bands here like you do in the states. Aside from the obvious language barrier, it takes some drinking to really get them to loosen up. I often feel like I'm just a few inches outside of a really funny joke. So it's great when we can really enjoy the company of a group like this. How does Yoichi keep finding these groups?

I don't really know what to say about tonight's show. I don't know if it was our best show ever. But it really felt that way. I even chipped another fucking tooth! Again, that sounds awful (and it hurts like fuck) but it's sort of a badge of honor at punk shows. It's so great to have almost all of our friends in Japan all here at this one gig. I saw every member of Drift Age and the Because do a stage dive at one point or another. It was so great I almost felt like we should just go ahead and split up the band because I couldn't imagine a more perfect final gig.



June 6<sup>th</sup> – Tokyo – shopping and drinking

We had lunch in Harajuku of all places with Drift Age and the Because. It was really funny. It was a pretty decent Italian restaurant. But it was all super fashion kids all over dressed up like they're out of the pages of Gothic Lolita or something. After that experience I went with Yuka from the Because over to Snoopy World. It's nice that at least one other person wants to do something silly like look at giant 20 foot tall Snoops. After that we drove over to Shinjuku to check out a new anarcho type info shop. I got some cool Japanese patches and badges. I don't really wear that kind of stuff. But it all looked so great and I wanted to help the cause even if just a little. It was a cool place to chill out before the bands had to start driving south. It took a little out of the blow of saying goodbye.

After grabbing up some more records (Stalin reissue 7") over at Allman, I head over to Shimokitazawa to catch up with Mole, Useke, Yoichi and Ben. Not surprisingly, we hit a bar not too far from Yoichi's place. They all get beers and I maintain my reputation for lame, girl drinks by getting a Kahlua Coffee. There are incriminating photos of me in Tokyo from over a decade ago drinking Fuzzy Navel and Sex On The Beach... This, of course, turned into a little drinking party with Massa and the drummer

from Blotto eventually showing up followed by Chris and the guys from Hammer. Finally Kaori pops in and the gang's all here. I switch to some sort of Lychee cocktail and it's off on the A Train to Shitface. I love Japan. I love the punk scene here. I love the Snuffy Smile bands. I love bands like Hammer. It's all so positive and fun. I almost feel like things are getting better.



SEISHUN ZANKOKU MONOGATARI US TOUR 2005

June 30<sup>th</sup> – Ft. Worth, TX

Another last minute show and I wonder if we should add this town to Salt Lake City and Boise as places that really will never like us. The kids doing the shows here are real cool. But we can't get people to come out to save our lives. We stayed with Chris and Stacy's pal Jade in her cool digs. Lots of cool artifacts around every corner and a mess on every floor. We were talking about horror movies like "The Sentinel" and "The Changeling" and she started to tell a story about how she tells people that the ghost of a little boy lives in her attic and how once in a while you can catch a glimpse of him looking out the window. Of course, it's just a bullshit story she made up to scare people. But as she told it, the lights began to flicker. We both got a little freaked out and decided to talk about nice things for the rest of the night.

JULY 1<sup>st</sup> – Memphis, TN

Oh, the first J Church US Tour, we played the Antenna Room and it sucked shit. There's been a rumor ever since that I said we would never play Memphis again. That doesn't really sound like something I would say. But I can imagine saying that we would never play the Antenna again... And we didn't.

So now we're rolling through the thunderstorm to headline a big hardcore show. In my dreams, we would play a lot more diverse shows like this. Shit, we've done festivals with Refused, loads of stuff with John Henry West, Econochrist and Spitboy. We had a brilliant show with the Business. We even did a Hardline Festival once. It's always turned out cooler than expect. I like playing with bands that are mining in a totally different area.

Bury The Living may be the best hardcore band in America right now. I don't know who else would come close. They are playing at the peak

of their game. The second album is huge and live they are madness. Some of the nicest guys you will ever meet.

Seein' Red are fucking perfect! They were more amazing than the last time I saw them eight years ago. Smart, ferocious – it makes up for a lot of the pain I suffer from having never seen Larm.

The Lorraine is walking distance from the club. Joey walks us over. It's eerie as hell. The whole place is now a museum. Even at 2:00 AM it's lit up perfectly intact from the day MLK was shot. Being a long time politico, I sort of get jaded and bored when people talk about MLK. But not here. It's pretty affecting.

We grab some vegan nachos at some lame frat bar and start the long drive to Chicago.

JULY 2<sup>nd</sup> – Chicago, IL  
Is the Fireside gone or not? I keep getting mixed messages. This show would've been a bit too big for that place. We're on third out of five tonight and it's a nice break. Last night was ridiculous the more I think about it. What the hell strange world is it where WE headline over Seein' Red?

I fucking love playing Chicago. Everyone had their shows they were psyched about and this one was mine. We tear through our set though somewhat delirious from the all night drive followed immediately by lunch at Sultan's. But we make it and it's fun. We get off stage just as Cissy and crew show up. Oh well, we'll be seeing them again soon.

I've loved the Groovie Ghoulies for years and years. I remember seeing them in LA back in the late 80s with Haunted Garage or some other Hollywood monstrosity. Roach was the only one I really new before this night. She was having some amp problems but smiled through the adversity. They perfectly encapsulate a certain strain of punk rock that I totally respect. It's the theatrics of cool. They've got real style that lives in their music as well as their record covers, shirts and stage look. But it's not just some contrived gimmick to make a buck. I think their longevity alone is proof of that. They really mean it. Have you ever seen Kepi's paintings? They're quite beautiful. I keep kicking myself that I never bought one at the show with the Epoxies. At one point he remarked that this show was great and like the old days. I knew exactly what he meant. The old days for us is like '96 to '98. Those were great years to be doing this kind of music.

Heading were the Methadones. I love these guys. We hadn't seen them since the tour we did together the previous year. They are solidly part of the great Chicago tradition of Naked Raygun, Pegboy, Screeching Weasel, etc. "So Far Away" is my new anthem.

Out of nowhere, Aubrey and Beth (who I don't really know except through scene osmosis) are up from Austin. We hit the all-night Mexican restaurant and inadvertently walk through a gunfight. God, we were tired. Too tired to worry about flying bullets. Too tired to think about it.

July 3rd – Milwaukee, WI

We all meet up for lunch at the Chicago Café. The fake meat Ruben is unbelievable. I get that, the tea and the soup. Cissie winds up ordering the exact same thing accidentally. We are in sync with the Pedestrians. Love that band. Nice little patio out back too. We leave Virginia and company and hit the road for old Milwaukee.

Robert is running the show tonight so it's gonna be cool. Basement shows can rule if the person in charge knows their shit. It's always a relief to show up at a gig and see someone like Robert around. You can relax right away.

Lots of great bands tonight. Crucial Attack from Reno are great. Old school sXe hardcore, Skeeno style even doing "Young Til I Die". Classic. Cool guys too. It's great to find poison free kids that are cool and smart and not a bunch of right wing douche bags. They got added to this show at the last minute when the basement they were meant to play got shut down. It sucks for them, but I'm really glad we got to see them.

Lots of bands. Lots of fun. Best of all? Birthday Suit! One of the guitarists from Sweet J.A.P. and a fucking

amazing drummer do what truly makes me think of that first great Some Velvet Sidewalk LP. Hanging out at the backyard bar-b-que, I find out that not only was the drummer born in Hawaii, but at Queen's Hospital just like me! That's totally wild!

Hung out all night with Robert and Karoline. We did what we could to help with their bathroom/art project (if you have to ask...) and basically feasted on piles of amazing food they always seem to be surrounded by. I like their house too. I always look forward to hanging out. It's like Gypsy Hill or Yoichi's old place in Shimo-Kitazawa. It's a little relaxing refuge from tour.

July 4<sup>th</sup> – Minneapolis, MN  
Robert rode with us today. We also picked up Justin from Chinese Telephones. He's cool too. Robert brought along an amazing CD of Patton Oswalt. It's the funniest thing I've heard in ages. I saw him live once years ago back when I was still in San Francisco. I wanna say it was something with Janeane Garofalo or something. He's the king. He's so funny. I've gotta get a copy of this CD.

The Triple Rock is amazing, right? Of course it is. Now imagine playing there on America's birthday with Dillinger Four. It was a wild time.

Words can't describe the pleasure I got from watching Metal Gallagher. Believe it. They're a surprisingly solid Metallica tribute band fronted by a Gallagher impersonator. While the band ripped through their material, the Gallagher frontman was smashing watermelons and other fruit with a sledgehammer. In between songs he told some classics. They shouldn't



call it 'social security'. They should call it 'so-so' security," all with that nasal Gallagher voice.

Our pals in Heads and Bodies were next. They are another one of those bands who almost have a familiar sound. But because of their instrumentation, there's nobody like them. I've always dug them. But they are especially amazing with the new drummer. At one point I thought he was playing double kick. Nope. He was just powering through.

Dillinger Four were wastedly amazing. They were shotgunning beers and doing shots between songs. At one point, Billy was so gone he didn't even bother playing the song just pounding beers all the way through. He was pretty crazy and obliterated by the end of the night. We were meant to crash at his place. But Paddy saved us from that fate. Got some snacks and went back to his pad and chatted into the wee hours. that was cool as we never seem to usually have the time for that.

#### July 5<sup>th</sup> – Carbondale, IL

Lost Cross in Carbondale is like a deleted scene from "Suburbia". A punker house barely held together with duct tape for the last decade or so, it was nice to be even the smallest part of that legacy. I mean, it's fucked. The toilet is a disgrace. I don't know if there's running water in the pipes. There is running water on the floor of the basement where the bands play. It's crazy but cool, y'know?

Panic Button were fucking great. Excellent '80s OC style punk with a couple of snotty looking teen punkettes for good measure. A really solid set and it was exciting as you really felt that this was one of those bands that has a time limit. They'll never make it out of Carbondale so you've got to be as lucky as us to ever get to see them. You've gotta appreciate it too as you may never see them again. I've gotta get their demo.

We stayed in the attic of a different punk house. It was dark and I always have a hard time sleeping in these situations. First of all, I really am at the age where I need to shower after playing a show. But also, dark cluttered attic? I always feel like I've set up my sleeping bag on a nest of spiders or something. The girls who lived at the house were cool and at least one of them was arty farty. I mean that in a good way. We were surrounded by big brightly colored canvasses with somewhat disturbing imagery. Now that I read that back, it sounds like I'm making fun of her art, but it was really pretty cool.

#### July 6<sup>th</sup> – Lawrence, KS

Haunted Kitchen? With last night and tonight, we must be in the scary name part of the tour. Haunted Kitchen, what debauchery have you seen in the past? Another cool punk house, this one has much more of a crusty / traveler bent to it. The people here are all really cool and the basement is nice. We keep hearing stories of a totally wasted Signal Lost show where Stan got loaded and totally lost his shit. I can't really imagine it. I think we may be the one and only band they've ever put on that wasn't total Thrashasaurus Rex. It was very cool of them to do a show like this for us.

Oh God!!! I just remembered that one of the crusties there was missing a foot. I'll say this; the man was definitely NOT properly cleaning or dressing the wound. Fuck, it was just this gross ass, bloody nub sticking out of his pants. I guess he had hurt his foot a while back and just never dealt with it and eventually the whole thing just went septic. He fucking kept the foot in a small barrel of formaldehyde. That's some fucking bullshit.

#### July 7<sup>th</sup> – Oklahoma City, OK

We got some great Ethiopian food in downtown Lawrence. There are a lot of cool places to eat on the little drag. I always like checking out that record store up on the second floor. It's always cool and the folks there seem nice. I couldn't find the Patton Oswalt CD I wanted but I did get a book on Manuel Ocampo. The girl that rang me up gave me a cool discount too. It's a perk of being in a band. But I always feel a little weird when someone hooks me up. I always expect to pay and I would hate to think that there are people out there that think I would expect some sort of deal just for being me.

The Conservatory in Oklahoma City is decent little cabaret-looking venue. Connected to a cool little record shop, we spent a good part of the night going back and forth. The store is chaos in the kind of way that excites most record nerds. It's what you would hope for. There are some real finds if you are willing to spend the time digging under shelves and in backroom piles of vinyl. I was still able to buy quite a few things only slightly

exceeding my tour budget.

The show was cool. It wasn't amazing and it was hardly packed. But there were enough people that it was fun. We're at that stage of tour where we are in our stride, so it doesn't matter to me who is there. It's just good to play.

#### July 8<sup>th</sup> – Denton, TX

We drive overnight to the 'burbs of Dallas where the Pfeffer's emanate from. It's the same kind of generic American nowhere that my folks left Hawaii for. His mom wasn't expecting us and freaks out a little. But it all turns out okay and we sleep in the picture perfect living room of my Sears Roebuck nightmare.

It's been a while since I've spent any time in the 'burbs, a weird landscape that nothing in my childhood prepared me for. What do you do in these towns? Against Stacy's vocal objection, we go to the local multiplex that's been fully outfitted with neo-fascist police towers overlooking the parking lot. Justin, Ben and Stacy get high in the van and we are by far the weirdest of the weirdos here. So who knows what the cops are looking for... probably Mexican's trying to illegally cross into Plano.

"Revenge of the Sith" is loud and that's all that really matters. It's not a good movie. But when you're doing the big theater thing, it can be any old crap. As long as it's air conditioned and loud, any chimp can be entertained for an hour and a half. There is actually one part of the film that I genuinely really liked and it's when they go aboard the rebel Blockade Runner. I'm a total nerd. It reminds me of the sets in the original Star Wars which is sort of what I miss the most about the more recent trilogy.

Anyway, the show is cool. It's at a pizza place where you play in the basement. There are a lot of bands, and they're all worth checking out. Fighting Dogs? Is that what they were called? I think its Philly folks. They were a real treat, as I didn't know anything about them. Really powerful like Rambo on a good stereo with a graphic EQ. It's cool when you see a band in a totally overworked genre like grind doing something innovative without sounding too

quirky or corny.

Signal Lost came up from Austin for this show. I love this band and wish we could play with them more often. Chris isn't really into doing double duty on the drums. So this is a rare show together. They're one of my favorite Austin bands along with Storm the Tower and Army of Jesus.

I love the Pedestrians. I can't believe this is the only time we've played with them. I finally get to see Cissie and Justin rock out. They are so great sounding and so refreshing. They're quintessential snotty punk rock sort of like Code of Honor or maybe the first Asexuals record but more raw and less prone to the pop stuff.

What a fun show. Even Thorn was out visiting from the Bay. We had a long drive back to Austin with Chris at the wheel, tired as hell. It gave me and Mike a chance to chat while Ashley and Stacey crashed out. Now it's back to work and all the stupid questions. I can take it from the fellow proles. But it's the too friendly customers who don't realize that they're fucking normals that bug me. How do you explain to someone like that why these tours even happen? You can't. There is such a small number of people who get it and can really appreciate it. If they really do get it, they're at least peripherally involved as they would understand the rewards and results. A week or so ago, this tour seemed like a pain in the ass. Now I don't wanna stop.

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- Page 9 - Hard Skin in Tokyo
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Amebix were sort of the Venom of the early British anarcho scene. They were also one of the few to release records in the States with their second LP coming out on Alternative Tentacles. Here's an interview I did with Rob (bass, vocals) for my book, 'Let The Tribe Increase'.

**Lance - How did you get into punk rock?**

Rob - Through Stig, my older brother and friends at school, we listened to everything we could get hold of and John Peel on the radio to find out what was happening.

**Lance - What made you want to start a band?**

Rob - Stig suggested it when he returned from Jersey. We liked the ideas of Sniffing Glue fanzine who said that anyone could have a go. So we took them literally without any musical knowledge or even the ability to tune our guitars.

**Lance - How did you all meet and when was that? Where were you living?**

Rob - We originally formed at school. Billy and Clive were in the Band With No Name, the first band. We went through several changes in line up before going to Bristol and meeting Disorder.

**Lance - What made you choose the name Amebix? Were you really originally called The Band With No Name?**

Rob - Amebix was from Ameoba. We decided on the name after a gig in a special school in Devon. We were emphasizing how primitive we were; a basic musical form.

**Lance - What previous bands had you been in or was it your first? Who were Scum?**

Rob - That was the first band any of us had been in. Spider was in a band called Scum before he joined Amebix in around 84. The original band had been playing since '78.

**Lance - From the start, the band was much darker and heavier than anyone else going. What were some of your original inspirations and ideas for the band?**

Rob - When Martin joined us we lived in his parents' manor house on the edge of Dartmoor. Very ancient

Scooby-doo type of place. We got into drugs there and playing at night, sleeping during the day, reading a lot of Occult stuff. We were drawn to a heavier type of imagery than anything that had previously been associated with punk rock.

**Lance - How did you find out about Crass and anarcho punk?**

Rob - A lad called Ali at the special school I mentioned there were a lot of punk kids from London who had been sent to that school for behavioral problems. We hung out with them when they came into town, and they introduced us to some new music.

**Lance - What were the early gigs like? Who were you playing with?**

Rob - We played around youth clubs and village halls for the time we were in Devon, often being canned off stage or attacked. Some trendy new wave types of bands were also on the scene. They could play.

**Lance - How involved were you with the anarcho scene at the time?**

Rob - Hardly at all in Devon. But once we moved to Bristol we were living the life all the time through necessity. Squatting and eating from the bins.

**Lance - Did you feel part of the anarcho scene?**

Rob - Yes and no. I always thought we had another take on music and attitude, not so much political, although we tried to be at first.

**Lance - What was the first demo like? What was it like recording it?**

Rob - Stig and I recorded a terrible demo in my bedroom in a couple of hours. We sold six copies, and one of them I gave to Crass when I was working as a music reporter for a local paper. That gave us our first track on "Bullshit Detector".

**Lance - How did you wind up on the first Bullshit Detector compilation? How did it affect the band?**

Rob - It was very encouraging for us. It helped us to decide to pursue the music further.

**Lance - It was three years before you released your first 7". Were you playing a lot at that point?**

Rob - We were mainly trying to survive when we hit Bristol. It was a very desperate time. I still don't know quite how we managed to record at all. But we all put in our dole cheques and went for a day's session for "Who's the Enemy".

**Lance - What was your relationship with Disorder? Were you sharing a drummer or did he leave them for Amebix?**

Rob - We squatted together, shared everything, gigged together and shared the drummer until

Virus left Disorder for Amebix full time, but only for a while before he left.

**Lance - How did you hook up with Spider Leg?**

Rob - Through Crass. They were the label of Flux of Pink Indians. Crass sent us to them.

**Lance - "No Gods, No Masters" from "Who's The Enemy?" seems to have been your slogan. What made that song especially important?**

Rob - It is still a relevant slogan; self empowerment.

**Lance - Were you still squatting at this point?**

Rob - Yes.

**Lance - The follow-up "Winter" seems even darker. How much do you think lifestyle had to do with your worldview and songwriting?**

Rob - It was very much an expression of everything around us. It was a grim time in the early days in Bristol, the drugs and the hardships.

**Lance - Why did you decide to make "No Sanctuary" a 12" and not an LP?**

Rob - We didn't think there was enough material for an LP. Also a lot of people were doing 12"s at that time, seemed right.

**Lance - What was it like working on that record? How was it received?**

Rob - We recorded in London, stayed with Flux and worked hard at it. Jello visited the studios and told us that he liked what we were doing and wanted to offer us a deal if we needed one later on.

**Lance - Did you tour much at that point?**

Rob - A fair amount. Disorder and Amebix would do a lot of gigs together all over the country, including free festivals etc.

**Lance - Why did you decide to switch to Alternative Tentacle? How did you know them?**

Rob - We began to get more serious by the time we were writing material for "Arise". We took Jello up on his offer, although they were a little disturbed by the Metal sound when we presented the finished recording.

**Lance - That seems to be your most popular record. How would you compare it to the rest of your releases?**

Rob - It is still strong. Simple and strong. I am very proud of that record as a real milestone. "Monolith" was very badly produced.



For me "Arise" was our "Black Sabbath", and "Monolith" was "Never Say Die".

**Lance - What was "Largactyl" all about?**

Rob - It was about the drugs that Martin was put onto after we left Devon and his parents returned to find their son a junkie.

**Lance - Why didn't you do another record with Alternative Tentacles? Why did you leave?**

Rob - I don't know. I think that we felt that they were uncomfortable with our direction and were not really doing any kind of promotion. That's what we felt at the time. "Arise" could have been a huge hit if people had really believed in us. I still appreciate their help though.

**Lance - Had you always been into heavy metal? Do you feel like it always was a big influence on the band?**

Rob - We were all into a lot of different music, from T Rex, Killing Joke, Sabbath, Bowie, Eno, everything. A lot of really good metal was emerging with the likes of Accept and Mercyful Fate. I got right into that.

**Lance - What was Heavy Metal Records? What made you choose to work with them?**

Rob - FM Revolver records had a sub label called Heavy Metal. Stone Roses were on the label just prior to us appearing there. We wanted to get our music across in to the Metal scene as the Punk thing was dissipating into lethargy and rot.

**Lance - How did you feel about that record?**

Rob - It is a very, very intense record, but terrible production. Some of that were heavy. We were by the sheer could get musical. Lance line-up there course history? Rob - Lance b a n d



the songs on extraordinarily played live. overwhelmed amount of power we out of so little ability.  
- How many changes had been over the of the band's

Half a dozen.

**- Why did the split up?**

Rob - We came to a point where we were no longer inspired. We ran out of juice. It was as if we had been given a certain amount of energy in order to make those two LPs and then we were empty. The choice was either to continue and become a parody of ourselves or to be true to the whole ethos of Punk Rock, die young, burn out at your height. I am still proud that we were the only one of our contemporaries who actually took that path and stuck to it. It is embarrassing to hear decades old renditions of re-hashed punk bands who didn't know when to stop, or those who have reformed for the money. Amebix was the art of punk in a complete sense. It will never be reproduced and stands as a righteous testament to our life and times. The Power Remains.

**Lance - Since then, there have been a few posthumous releases: "V Zivo" cassette on a Yugoslavian label, "The Power Remains" LP on Skuld, "Beginning Of The End" CD, "Make Some Fucking Noise" LP on a Slovenian label. Could you comment on any of these?**



Rob - The "Make Some Fucking Noise" remix is good, very happy to hear that. A lot of other people have ripped us off all the way along. We haven't received any courtesy from any bootleggers with one exception. We never did it for the money but many people have made money off our backs and that saddens me. They forgot what it was about.

**Lance - What did the others go on to do? Are you in touch with many ex-members?**

Rob - Stig has had drug problems since those days. He is very ill. Spider has tinnitus and I hear from him from time to time. Stig is my brother. It has been hard to watch him destroy himself since those days in Devon. Choice is a terrible thing at times.

**Lance - How do you reflect on the anarcho days? All naïve or in some ways effective?**

Rob - A lot of the sentiments expressed in those days have become mainstream policy. A lot of those same sentiments have led us to the current politically correct approach which is sometimes wrong.

**Lance - Do you still feel connected to any of those ideas?**

Rob - No Gods, No Masters.

**Lance - How do you reflect on the band's history?**

Rob - As I have said before, great and tragic times, a full and involved story, a complete cycle. Amebix only ever gets more popular as the originators of a particular force.

**Lance - Anything else?**

Rob - No



Faction were an anarcho band that sprung from Anthrax. This interview with Rob (bass player) was done for my book on anarcho punk in England.

**Lance - How did you get into punk rock?**

Rob - I lived in Warminster, Wiltshire, when 12 in '76 and hung around with a gang. Up to then we spent all our money on cigs and cider (I had just moved on from model railways). We heard about punk very early and just had to hear as it was released.

First single "Hangin' Around" / "London Girl" - The Stranglers. Some of that gang, including my best mate Bruce, went on to form bands like Stupid Humans, Subhumans and Organised Chaos.

**Lance - What made you want to start a band?**

Rob - I was "lucky" to then move to another hive of punk activity, north Kent. With two mates we started Enigma fanzine, which was printed on the local church's Gestetner printing machine (my dad was a vicar). One of those mates, Oscar, fancied himself as a singer and then Anthrax (UK version) were formed. Cue rehearsals in church hall etc. We were crap, up and till the point myself and the

other singer Sue left! Then, next thing I know they were on Crass records and I left Kent to live in London.

**Lance - How did you all meet and when was that? Where were you living?**

Rob - Sue, Martin, and I were all from Kent and formed Faction. Sue was 14 and shouldn't have been in a punk band, but she looked great with spiky hair. Martin and I lived in a squatted street in Hackney, Brougham Road, I lived at no 96 and we had a rehearsal space in our basement.

**Lance - What was the punk scene like there at the time?**

Rob - In Kent, some people were in to Oi, some into the Anarcho stuff. We had the Red Lion in Gravesend which put on regular gigs. So there was a scene. Also running a fanzine meant we were in touch with the outside world.

**Lance - What made you choose the name the Faction?**

Rob - I think it was by democratic vote. The name scored quite highly because you could circle the A and N, and convert the O in the CND sign. Essential stuff.

**Lance - What were the early gigs like? Who were you playing with?**

Rob - As Anthrax we were mates of Conflict. All I remember was that east London skinheads wanted to beat us up and there were plenty of gigs at Gravesend's Red Lion.

**Lance - How did you find out about Crass and anarcho punk?**

Rob - Fod, who I started Enigma fanzine with, owned one of the original Small Wonder issue Crass-Feeding of the 5000 albums. "Do they owe us a living? Cos they fucking do". From that point we got to know Crass, Poison Girls, The Epileptics, UK Decay etc. Enigma fanzine ranted about all the right/wrong things, plus it came with a free screen-printed patch.

**Lance - Did you feel part of the anarcho scene?**

Rob - Obviously living in London was a whole lot different than living with your parents.

The Hackney/East London/Squat scene was now home to Mob, Zounds and Blood and Roses. Those bands were embraced by The Kill Your Pet Puppy (fanzine) collective who were dressed in dayglo, fishnets, crimped purple and pink spiky hair etc. They looked great and were more interested in personal politics than changing the world. Crass and co were still important, but every week there was a new band releasing an EP on Crass Records, dressed in black telling us that bombs and government were bad. Our priorities were now stealing electricity, vegetables from Spitalfields market etc. I was active in putting on shows, first at the Wapping Anarchy Centre and then the squatted school on Harrow Road.

**Lance - How did you wind up doing a record for Bluurg?**

Rob - I always kept in touch with Bruce, through him I met Dick. Nothing could have prepared me for meeting Dick for the first time. He's an inspirational guy, a ball of energy and doesn't take himself too seriously. That's what set the Subhumans apart from most bands at the time and is why they have lasted so long. The music has always been good whatever the message, you know the band enjoy what they do.

Often the band were staying at our squat in London, consuming our food/drugs/drink, it would have been rude them not putting our EP out.

**Lance - Did you ever release any tapes through Bluurg before the EP?**

Rob - I started 96 tapes (...from 96 Brougham Road) a cassette only label around the time that Dick was starting to release tapes through Bluurg. Best 96' releases were Blood And Roses demos, Faction stuff and Blyth Power's legendary A Little Touch Of Harry in the Night album.

**Lance - What was it like recording that EP? What was the response to it?**

Rob - I can't remember much about the recording other than Southern Studios head-honcho John Loder and Engineer banging his head against the mixing desk as we tried for the nth time to get an essential keyboard time. I don't think he understood what we were doing. I don't think we knew what we were doing.

**Lance - Who did the cover art? Was it a conscious effort to do something different from all the other black and white anarcho sleeves at the time?**

Rob - I did the front cover. Paul did the inner illustration. I personally printed the covers. There was no conscious effort to do anything different, we were just creating a bit of art, unfortunately it didn't quite end up how I wanted.

**Lance - How many line-up changes had there been over the course of the band's**

Rob - History? Three singers in all. Neil (pre-Blyth Power) joined us on keyboards)

**Lance - Why did the band split up?**

Rob - Personally I was more interested in running the cassette label and the mail order company I set up, Wot? Distribution to sell Indie Vinyl and Cassettes, imported Flipside magazines etc. The lure of travelling to play exotic places like Hulme, Rochdale, Wolverhampton etc had worn off. It was more fun hanging out in London.

**Lance - What did the others go on to do? Are you in touch with many ex-members?**

Rob - I'd love to think that Paul (Van Transit) was still listening to Joan Jett and Van Halen, whilst still owning a star shaped Washburn guitar. Neil was probably the last guy I met from the band. I think they and Martin still live in London, whilst Mel is still in the West Country I think.

**Lance - How did you get involved with All**

**The Madmen? When was that?**

Rob - It must have been around '83/'84. The Mob's 'Let The Tribe Increase' had been out for a good year or so and sold 15000+, the band had split and Mark, Curtis and Josef had no real plans for the label. I was keen to make use of the manufacture and distribution deal they had with Rough Trade Distribution. I just happened to be around Mark and Josef's gaff a lot and I had half a business head.

**Lance - What made you want to take over that label? Who were you working with? Who was Alistair?**

Rob - Alistair was part of the Kill Your Pet Puppy Collective and shared a house with Mark from Mob. The Mob bequeathed the label to Alistair and then in turn myself. I continued sending them royalties, ensure the albums got distributed and got to release more albums. This was '83/'84 and I had gone self-employed to run Wot Distribution and 96 Tapes. In that world I was "business".

**Lance - How do you reflect on the anarcho days? All naïve or in some ways effective?**

Rob - We wanted to change the world: Stop The City, Battle Of Wapping etc. A lot of the people involved in that scene were living outside London when "punk happened" in London, we wanted to be a part of something and were ready to get off our arses and do something. We started labels, bands, fanzines, promoted gigs, protested, squatted houses and venues etc. Concurrently Indie Labels and Indie Record Distribution (Rough Trade etc) were starting to happen, it was part of the same thing. We didn't change the world, but just as importantly we changed our world.

**Lance - Do you still feel connected to any of those ideas?**

Rob - Yes in some way, however my own personal ideas have evolved; the root of these ideas was when I started becoming aware of politics, protest and anarchism. I can't say my ideas are that recognizable now and I am sure one or two people would love to call me a hypocrite for being part of a successful commercial



business. I recently met a very old mate who I hadn't seen for 10 years, John Travis, he is now a producer of rock/hip-hop in the States and he told of a conversation he once had with Rick Rubin. Rubin asked "You used to be a punk, so how come you are so respectful to other people?". It was as if being a punk meant that you had to treat everybody with insults, John explained the (UK anarcho) scene he came from and how it had affected people who had come through it. That summed it up for me.

**Lance - How do you reflect on the band's history?**

Rob - I got to see Rochdale, Peak District and Paris. I am really pleased to get the experience of being in a band. I have been hanging around musicians ever since. I am now a director of a festival, Summer Sundae Weekender and a booking agent.

**Lance - Anything else?**

Rob - Thanks for allowing a 40 year old to get a bit nostalgic.

*Modesty Blaise are a great indie pop group from England. For nearly a decade they've made great, airy music that is part '60s mod, part '80 indie part futuristic pop. Real nice guys, I did this email through the magic of MySpace... Ugh..*

**Lance - So are you most in love with the film or the comic? Monica Vitti was like the ultra mod.**

Modesty Blaise - The film definitely. Although it is largely incomprehensible, it is the look of it that is brilliant and Dirk Bogarde is fantastic in it. It would be interesting to see what it could have been like if it hadn't been hacked about by the studio, it's only the crap that gets a director's cut, not the stuff you really want to see. The comic strip used to be in the local paper in Bristol and the London Evening Standard so we were both familiar with it.

**Lance - Could you tell me about how the band first got together and what the idea was?**

Modesty Blaise - We were in proto-indie popsters, the influential but highly unpopular Boats Not Ships together. BNS had a huge influence on other indie bands, but they won't admit it. An awful lot of our ideas ended up on other people's records. Myspace BNS site coming soon, we've been wondering what to do with that old stuff for ages. Mostly we started because we thought everything else that was new was rubbish, we wanted to make records that we wanted to listen to. We did nothing for a long time then eventually found a line-up that worked and it went on from there under the name Modesty Blaise.

**Lance - Most people in the States don't know much about the '80s indie pop scene. Do you feel like you are part of the tradition of those bands like the Wedding Present or the Pastels?**

Modesty Blaise - We think that BNS were certainly part of that thing but not MB. Actually, we used to love The Pastels. We have always seen ourselves as more part of a Burt Bacharach/Glen Campbell/Chris Montez/The Byrds/The Kinks/The Beach Boys tradition. That sounds very 60s doesn't it? But there was also Orange Juice/JAMC/Aztec Camera/Primal Scream, the bands that always were trying to do something more than most of those C86 bands. We always wanted to make records that sound bigger, there is no dearth of ambition here, we make records to last for ever.

**Lance - Did you feel like there was any relationship between**

**the true indie pop groups and the punk scene? Do you think one led to the other or just two separate British phenoms?**

Modesty Blaise - The link is the DIY ethos but with the indiepop groups that's there because no record companies were interested and so they had to do it themselves. Depends on who you're talking about. Indie pop started with Postcard who, let's not forget, were trying to be a Scottish Chic Organisation. Witness Poor Old Soul, it's a pop group trying to do Chic and failing but making something else.

That's what happens with us. Musically and lyrically there's not much of a link between indie and punk, don't let anyone tell you there is, punk is hip and they all want to say they're punk groups. Are The Buzzcocks a punk group? No of course not, they're a pop group who emerged at that time (they might have been a punk group had Devoto stayed). And there's a huge time gap between Postcard and C86 which is when everyone started buying into the Velvet Underground thing. Don't ask us stuff like that, we can theorize about pop music for days on end, why do you think we release very few records?

**Lance - In all honesty, your music often reminds me more of '60s pop like the Association or even the Turtles. Do you worry about sounding retro? How do you keep sounding contemporary?**

Jonny - Thank you. I love The Association and The Turtles. Dave thinks that some of my lyrics could not have been written in the 60s and that certainly goes for some of the recording techniques too. So, we'll be in that tradition then but we don't think we actually sound like that. Here we go then, it is the big question that gets asked of us and I can rant about this for ever.

Modesty Blaise - Good art is not limited by time. Ooh, I'm not looking at that Picasso because it's really old. Titian, rubbish, it's centuries out of date. It's only in the modern media that this becomes an issue and it's because press is all about what is new. It shouldn't be, it should be about what's good. There are far too many records, far too many bands and the vast majority are dreadful. You'll never hear everything that's good so don't spend your time listening to crap. That's why the press do it but it misrepresents what's happening because it doesn't matter what's happening, it matters what is good. It's the interface of art and commerce and, sadly, commerce wins every time. I worry about people thinking I sound retro, mostly because they don't understand the above. People use the word retro to mean bad, but it shouldn't mean that, but it also shouldn't mean good. We sound contemporary because we are contemporary, good art is timeless. We worry about this a lot. The gap between perception and reality is huge.

**Lance - What's your favorite thing to eat?**

Modesty Blaise - Tunnock's Tea Cakes.

Jonny - Dave likes everything except Grape Nuts, pea and ham soup and coal. I like Thai Green Curry, Risotto, Heinz Baked Beans on cheese on toast. I hate mushrooms, they are the Devil's Fungus.

**Lance - How do you reflect back on your earliest material? Do you ever do stuff like "Christina Terrace" live?**

Jonny - There's often a discussion about what to play, sometimes we like to play old stuff but we always try to do new stuff as well. At the moment we like the Terrace, so if we ever get round to playing



we might do it. Gregory doesn't like doing Blue & Beautiful or the Terrace, we think. We certainly don't have a problem with playing our hit singles. I'm going to do an acoustic date soon and I think I'll do Proof if Proof Were Needed.

**Lance - Do you plan to ever tour again?**

Modesty Blaise - Yes. We'd like to do some one-off shows but we'd be happy to tour when we have a new album out. We'll do anything if it interests us enough.

**Lance - Could you talk a bit about your relationships with Spirit of '86 and Savage Bee Recordings?**

Modesty Blaise - Savage Bee is our own label, dates back to old BNS days when the whole band lived in one house like the Beatles in Help! only vertically. That was called Savage House, we had a little logo on

the doorbell. Spirit of '86 was a record label that was run by Ian Ballard of Damaged Goods and Huw Williams of the Pooh Sticks that put out our first two singles, Dave was PS bass player. We knew Huw from the Boats Not Ships days when he was writing a fanzine I think. The problem with Spirit of '86 was that we were a low priority for both Ian and Huw so we put out 'Modern Guitars with Amplification' on Savage Bee so that we could be a bit more in control of things and find out when our records are being released in advance not just find them in shops like The Monkees did.

**Lance - If you could have written any song in the world by any band, what song would it be?**

David - Does it have to be a band? I'd like to have written a song. That's a trifle unfair.

Jonny - Dave was largely responsible for lyrics on Jennifer (and the people who married her). I'd like to have written Windmills Of Your Mind by Michel Legrand and Alan & Marilyn Bergman. But it's not a band, it's Noel Harrison (Rex Harrison's son, trivia fans). If it's a band then Heroes and Villains by The Beach Boys, but really it's Brian Wilson and Van Dyke Parks and the rest of the band had little to do with it.

**Lance - What do you dislike the most about touring? What are your worst tour stories?**

David - The worst thing about touring is being stuck in a tour van or hotel room with band members with poor personal hygiene. When touring Spain in 1999 we thought that someone had been sick in the hotel but it turned out to be Clem's feet. I am still at a loss to explain quite how they could have smelt so bad but I remember that when we toured Germany the following year he decided to stop washing or changing his clothes about 2 days into the tour so it was definitely a recurring problem.

Jonny - True, very true. I'm not fond of people disappearing when on tour. It happens quite a lot actually. Truthfully though, the bad bits fade from the memory, if they didn't I'm sure we'd never do it again.

**Lance - What are some bands around today that you feel like you relate to? Anyone you feel is mining in a similar area?**

David - There are some bands around that we like although I'm not sure if anyone is doing exactly the same sort of stuff as we are. Jonny is a big fan of the High Llamas. I am quite fond of Franz Ferdinand.

Jonny - I think Sondre Lerche sounds like us, not sure if he's ever heard Melancholia though, probably just listen to the same records.

**Lance - What do you think is the best song you've ever written and why?**

Jonny - Mmm, another interesting question. There is, of course, a huge difference between a good song and a good record. My best records are Carol Mountain and Let's Get Together. Currently my favorite song of Jonny's is "Even in My Darkest Hour".

David - I think Garden Of Our Love is a fine song and so is You're More Beautiful When You're Sad, that could be the best, not sure really.

**Lance - How would you characterize the difference between the romance of your songs and romance of typical commercial radio pop?**

Jonny - So you get that it's about romance then, amazing, nobody ever gets that. There is little difference I suspect, except that an awful lot of current commercial pop is very forceful

about it's sexuality whereas my lyrics are slightly more obscure. Interestingly, Let's Get Together was my attempt to write a song about sex, I just can't do it very well. It's possibly that touch of British reserve plus I think it's a lot more clever to allude to something than just to say it outright.

**Lance - Do you feel like you're on a mission or trying to reclaim something? What propels the band especially after all this time?**

David - I think we are propelled by a belief that what we are doing is worthwhile. We would have given it up long ago if we didn't really believe in it.

**Lance - Looking back on your 10+ years, what elements do you think exist in every incarnation of Modesty Blaise?**

David - The obvious common element in all the incarnations of Modesty Blaise is Jonny's songs and vocals style. We have never really set out to play any particular style of music but have always tried to play and record songs in the style to which they are most suited.

Jonny - I want to do a country album.

**Lance - Do you all have regular jobs? What do you do outside of the band?**

David - Jonny works at a concert Hall insulting pop stars of all ages and types, I work at a University, making life hell for students and Mark is a Social Worker and cyclist. I'm not sure what Greg does.

Jonny - Greg is a Graphic Designer!

**Lance - Do you have a sentimental attachment to vinyl, especially 7"s, that a lot of indie pop fans do?**

Modesty Blaise - Yep. I'm also developing a sentimental attachment to cds as well. And 8-track cassettes.

**Lance - What's your hometown and what's your favorite thing about it?**

Jonny - Shirehampton, a small place on the outskirts of Bristol. My favourite thing is that I rarely go there now. Of Bristol though, my favourite thing is Bristol City Football Club.

David - My Home town is Broxbourne in Hertfordshire. Most interesting thing about it (although not necessarily my favorite I should point out) is the former Broxbourne Zoo now called 'Paradise Wildlife Park' which was briefly famous as 'The Beast's Belsen' because they killed an elderly Lion by backing a lorry up to its cage and running the exhaust until it died of Carbon Monoxide poisoning!

**Lance - Anything else?**

David - Wood is an insulator.



*The Pedestrians, I don't really remember how I came to know them. I think we J Church crashed at Cissie and Jordan's old place in Chicago. It's always weird when you become good friends with someone before you hear their band. What a huge relief when we finally played with them and they were great. I love these folks though it always makes me wonder how many of my friends just tolerate the incessant hum of J Church...*

Lance - You've been described as having a "distinctively Mid-Western punk rock sound." What the hell does that mean? Do you sound like Die Kreuzen or Husker Du? Is there really a Mid-West punk sound? Jordan - I think regionalism in Punk rock can get a little out of hand at times. If the Zero Boys were from the O.C. or maybe Reagan Youth would people say that they were totally Cali bands? Besides me and Brad, no one else in the band has lived the majority of their lives in the mid-west. People just feel the need to reference music a lot of the times.

Cissie: I don't know what that means. I don't think there is a Midwest punk sound, especially in this day and age. In Chicago, none of the bands even sound alike. I'm assuming that the reviewer meant that we are melodic but still aggressive like a lot of older midwest non-hardcore bands.

**Lance - Do you think you are part of some Chicago punk tradition that goes back to the Effigies and Naked Raygun or is that just a lack of imagination on the part of most record reviewers?**

Jordan: What year is it? I like both of those bands a lot, but both of those bands aren't in my top 25 favorite bands of all time (if I even had a list)... If people want to say we are from a tradition of Chicago punk, I'm cool with that- except there are lots of bands all across the US and world that have had influences on us individually and as a band. Our tastes are not just a couple of bands from Chi-town... though Articles of Faith and Crudos both blew my mind when I first heard them.

Cissie: Nah, we're not part of any tradition. I don't even know the folks in those bands. I can't really say what they were about and I'm not trying to follow in their footsteps...

David: I have never even heard the Effigies, and I hadn't heard Naked Raygun until after Pedestrians got started. I'm kind of a poser, I guess. I think talking about influences is tricky, because all the bands out there are feeding off of the same lineages. The bands that inspired me to play and write songs are not necessarily the originators of their style, it's just that I was exposed to them first. I have learned a lot about older, less well known bands associated with the beginnings of punk and hardcore just in the past two years.

Brad: I consider us to be the next Screeching Weasel.

**Lance - What made you choose that name? Your music isn't what I would call pedestrian...**

Cissie - It was the one name on the list that we all agreed on. It's usually the butt of a lot of jokes. I came up with it cos I liked the vision it put in my head and I also liked that it was one word, kinda simple but evoked an image. Everyone's a pedestrian at some point but it's more of a city thing. Our band name is Pedestrians not Pedestrian.

**Lance - Do you think there is a retro element to your music? What keeps your music feeling fresh?**

Cissie - Possibly a "retro element". I listen to a lot of old punk and hardcore so it makes sense that my influences are somewhat "retro". At the same time, I don't wanna imitate any particular band or style. When

we write songs, usually David or I come in with the bulk of it but everyone has input. We all listen to different shit so a lot of different influences are in there. I think there is a conscious effort for every song to stand on its own and sound interesting, at least to our ears.

Jordan: I think because we play in a mid-tempo beat, people say that we have a sort of retro sound. I think that's bullshit for the most part. Are the millions of D-Beatbandsretro? Punk is a tradition of music that often repeats itself. We are a punk band that (I believe) doesn't really sound like anybody else. We write songs together and each one of us comes from very different perspectives of punk so... I feel each new song we write feels pretty fresh to me.

David - this is a complicated question because there are a lot of bands right now that are getting attention for putting out songs with more of a mid-tempo feel. There is a retro nature to this shift, but it also represents progress from the early '00's when every band had to play as fast as possible. so is it old or new? does it really

matter?

**Lance - Do you worry that a lot of newer bands have a musical knowledge that only goes as far back as '80s hardcore? Or do you think that's a way to keep the sound pure? Is "Group Sex" really Year Zero?**

Jordan - Punks know more about the history of Punk than ever before. There are countless books and the net has made info on the subject pretty accessible to lots of people no matter what age you are. Kids get into what they hear first and like first. I first heard Dischord, Lookout, SST, and Alternative Tentacles records because that was the shit I could find in the middle of a my shitty home town. But my taste in punk has expanded the older I got and the more things that I've heard and seen. So no... I do not worry about newer bands not having musical knowledge. Maybe they will create something new and better than before. There always seems to be bands that keep the sound honest and pure.

*Cissie (i have no clue why I'm writing in italics now, sorry)- I think that a lot of kids tend to start with the 80's hardcore stuff because it is instantly accessible. It's easy to find the music and there is a wealth of information on that era. People will always be fascinated with that time and sound but most folks that I know start there then get into different shit as they get older. At least, that's what happened to me. Ten years ago, I only wanted to listen to Negative Approach and Void and although I still really enjoy those bands, my tastes are a bit more varied now. I even occasionally listen to music that's not punk, as heinous as that is.*

**Lance - It seems like both interest in your band and the intensity that some people dig your band have both really grown in the past year. What do you account for that?**

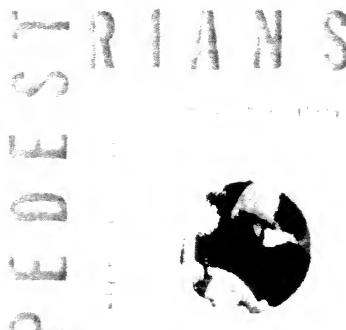
Cissie - I don't know. I think touring helps. A lot of people hadn't heard us until the past year. Now that we've been around a little while longer, and have played out a lot, more people are buying the records and becoming aware of us. I think that's how it normally works.

Jordan - Writing better songs, putting out better records, and playing out more.. I hope those are the reasons.

David - I would like to credit Sparks.

**Lance - How bad was that umpire's call in the USA/Japan World Classic?**

Jordan: Didn't see the game or really any of the World Classic, but I do think that the call made in last year's ALCS when the ball was ruled to have bounced to the catcher was bullshit even if it helped out the White Sox. You can't make that call in that situation unless it is clear.. like the Cardinals getting robbed in '87 with that call at first.



**Lance - What's the worst show you guys have ever played?**

Jordan - I don't know... Bloomington, Indiana. Not one of the 12 people cared and we weren't even on the flier... but Fourth Rotor played and they are awesome so...

David - and we were definitely well taken care of- no complaints there. We were given food and a place to sleep.

Cissie - We've played a few bad shows but most of our shows have been fun. None of the bad shows have been so bad that they're story worthy. The worst thing that's happened to us was driving out of our way to a show in Lawrence, Kansas that didn't exist. When they finally decided to talk to us, they said "we thought the show was supposed to be last night". That was annoying.

David - I agree, if that's our worst, we don't have that much to complain about.

**Lance - What do you hate the most about touring? What do you like about it?**

Jordan - I hate the lack of sleep and sleeping on floors. What I love the most is going into new cities and making friends instantly with new people. I also love playing music to people who don't know us and catching them off guard.

Cissie - I hate the lack of decent food on the highway. On the flipside, one of the best things about touring is eating awesome vegetarian food in cities across the nation (Love n Haight in SF, I'm thinking of you). Better than food though, is the part where we actually play the show. I like playing in different cities to different crowds of people every night. Seeing what type of venue each town has to offer. Also, I enjoy

hanging out with all my long distance friends. Night after night, seeing my favorite people that I rarely get to hang out with. I also really enjoy the uncertainty that comes with traveling. Things can always go either way, all the way from great to horrible, and that's awesome cos it often leads to interesting times and good stories.

Brad - I hate the indigestion and the lack of clean toilets. The two might be tied somehow. Everything else about tour is pretty great. Playing shows to 15 year olds and their moms is really what it's all about.

**Lance - Do you ever feel like touring makes you a sociopath? How about at least pathological?**

Jordan - I think the traveling gets to my mind at times. When driving long distances, I will often think about driving off cliffs or into large ditches- just daydreaming. Lots of thoughts about death and ways of dying...or sex, eating, and shitting. The basic nutty stuff...

Brad - I thought I was the only one who had the "What would happen if I ran into that cement column?" thoughts. After being home from tour and being back at work for one day I was already to go out again.

David - our band is unusual in that we don't ever really seem to get on one another's nerves... or maybe we do and are better at hiding it. On our last trip I found myself getting exasperated at certain people and situations, but it was all outside of us. And it would pass quickly. It's easy to get into tour mode where your life is simple: drive, eat, play show, have a beer, sleep, repeat. Yeah it can be stressful but I find it oddly calming to know that I don't really have any options.

Cissie - I think sitting at home alone and staring at my walls makes me a sociopath and that touring makes me sane.

**Lance - What inspired the record cover "Future Shock"? There's something about it that in a weird way makes me think of either the Wipers or the Zero Boys. What the hell is that font?**

Jordan - We talked to our friend Brendan (the artist) about doing a cover that would be shocking, reference the feel of the record, and

stand out. I don't know if this cover has a classic feel or not, but we wanted a cover that was loud, obnoxious, and recognizable. People seem to love it or hate it, which I think is great because that is the true nature of punk... right? I don't know why it makes you think of the Wipers (because it's angular?) and the Zero Boys (because it's yellow?)... cool, I love those bands.

Brad - It's easy to spot when you're glancing at your friend's record collection.

David - Someone told me it looked like a Stryper record from the back. That's pretty funny. Cissie - I don't know what the font is called but it comes from a pack of Letraset rub on letters. Check out the stock of Letraset letters at your local art supply or paper supply store. I'm sure they'll have that specific font in stock.

**Lance - There's a minimalism or at least an economy of language in your lyrics. Is that poetic license or does it have more to do with the vocals being so rhythmic?**

Jordan - Both, I guess. I write lyrics that I guess could be seen as being minimal... I personally like writing in a style that is open for people to interpret meaning and also can be catchy enough for people to sing along to. Often I will work on a song both with the sounds of the words as much as I do with the meaning of the words. It can take me a very long time to structure the words to the way I want them to sound. The lyrics are very important to me and I want them to resonate with people both musically and with the content.

**Lance - What is it about the song "Future Shock" that made you want to use it for a record title?**

Jordan - I had thought about that being the title for a while, but brought it up when we were recording the record. It seemed to ring well to everyone. The lyrics for the song are some of the more abstract words on the record, yet it kinda sums up everything about the record. It just made sense.

**Lance - There was about a year between the 7" and the LP. How would you characterize the change in sound between those records?**

Cissie - I don't think there was a conscious change in sound. We recorded the records at different studios, with different engineers and the recordings are pretty different but I think the songwriting is pretty similar. I guess we ended up putting our more upbeat songs on the 7" and saved the darker songs for the LP but it just kinda happened that way. It wasn't intentional.

David - I would say that far more of the change in sound had to do with the recording process than anything else. The LP was an immersive experience, and we had a common language with Stan, the engineer, for what we wanted to achieve. The 7" was more business. And I think we all thought the studio was a bit awkward in how high-end it was. It just wasn't set up for a band like us.

**Lance - Do you feel that yellow is a very risky color to associate your band with in the flat black world of punk?**

Jordan - Punk could do with a little kick in the ass or at least with a change in color... if pink is the new black then yellow is the new pink...

Cissie - I didn't realize that it was risky until I heard some of the reactions to the LP cover. I don't really think of it as a risky color 'cos it has existed for eternity. It's the color of the fucking sun. I find that a lot of my favorite records have a lot of color on them. I don't know if it's a coincidence or what. I've never been the kind of person to only wear black or buy records that only have black and white artwork (although there are plenty of great records with black and white artwork).

David - It's the color of street signs. That's always been my



reference point.

**Lance - Between the start of the band and now, did you discard many songs? Are there songs that you did in the beginning that make you cringe?**

Jordan - Yeah we have gotten rid of a few here and there... I don't think too much about the old songs... David - I know I do. There are definitely older songs that I enjoy listening to (such as on the demo) but I don't particularly want to play them live.

Cissie - We've dropped some songs. There aren't any that make me cringe. We keep writing new songs and those are more exciting to play so inevitably we end up dropping some old songs.

David - because we never seem to want to put more than 8 or 9 songs on a set list, Stuff at the bottom of the heap tends to fall away pretty quickly.

**Lance - Other than J Church, who is the most over-rated band you've played with on your many tours?**

Jordan - We haven't played with very many over-rated bands. And J Church is definitely not over-rated...

Cissie - With the current popularity of internet message boards it seems like every band is over-rated, at least for a month or so and then they are criticized or forgotten about.

Brad - Nobody is willing to name names, huh? I think Army of Jesus told me they were over-rated.

**Lance - Why do Rickenbacker basses look so punk?**

Cissie - Man I don't know. They sound fucking good too though.

David - It's because the headstock looks like it has an under bite. And so many punk bassists, whether they know it or not, want to be Lemmy. But not Cissie as far as I know.

**Lance - What's the best thing about being a band from Chicago?**

Jordan - All the other great bands that this city produces. It's great to play local shows or to go to one and see four very different bands that are very good. The other great thing about being from Chicago is getting compared to Naked Raygun and the Effigies...

Cissie - the DIY scene is great here right now. There are cool houses and venues to play and a lot of enthusiastic people booking shows and doing record labels. Another great thing, is the proximity of a lot of different cities like Milwaukee, St. Louis, Minneapolis, Pittsburgh, etc. Makes it easy to do weekend trips.

David - Cheap rent.

**Lance - Finally, isn't a 5¢ mylar bag justified if it can prolong an LPs life for up to 25 years (along with proper handling and only clean needles)?**

Cissie - You can afford a 5cent mylar bag too. There were a few extra expenses I skimped on. That was one and I don't ever think about it. I'm not gonna issue clean needles or a sheet with proper care instructions with the record either. I figure people that anal will take care of it on their own. Some people are so anal that they will only use a certain weight of mylar bags on their records. Lance, if you give me your address I will send you a mylar bag in the mail but only in trade for a CDR of old Icelandic post punk.

Jordan - Have you ever heard "Fuck Shit Up"... can't do that with mylar on your records...

David - Yeah, everyone knows if you issue clean needles, we'll all be hooked on drugs. Never mind that all the research points to needle exchanges being good public policy...

*Roy from Toxic Waste is a good guy. Started in Belfast in the early days of anarcho punk. Roy has continued to be involved in punk and radical politics over the years including time at the Warzone Collective. Here's the interview I did with him for "Let The Tribe Increase".*

**Lance - First of all, how did you get into punk rock? How did you get into anarcho punk?**

Roy - I first got into 'punk' when I realised that I was most definitely considered an outsider by my local community. I hated school

and my peers were full of shit whom mostly aspired to join various paramilitary organisations. I gravitated towards a group of similar individuals and we began to share music, fanzines, and alternative information about our situations locally, internationally and on a personal level. I guess being exposed to new ways of thinking about the world first appeared to me through the alternative music, fashion, and politics at the time in Belfast. I was attracted by 'otherness' and a desire to transcend the sectarian life, which was imposed upon me through religion, school, and state by an armed and physical presence.

I did not really get into anarcho punk but rather it got into me! Given the binary oppositional politics of N. Ireland late 70's and the reality of everyday life, anarchism allowed for self-empowerment and action rather than apathy.

**Lance - How did you meet? How did the band form? When was this?**

Roy - I had heard of Toxic Waste through the grapevine in the early eighties and at that time there was a kind of division between the old punk scene and this new style of 'Anarcho' punk. It was great, people were active and passionate about their politics, and I started to get into it as well. What you were saying and actually doing meant more than the fashion and music that had categorised the punks of the late seventies. Toxic Waste was one of the new style of punk bands (there were loads of others) who were writing thoughtful 'political' lyrics to their songs and who were living out the lifestyle as well. That's not to say that bands like SLF didn't write these type of songs or believe in them but the difference was that they were wrapped up in all the music industry shit that swallowed up the whole punk philosophy and made it into a business with so many units to shift in the record shops each week. Toxic Waste and other bands rejected all of this and once again began to find new ways for people to resist all the corporate bullshit that had been sucking Punk dry.

The band started in Newtownards

where they all lived, and then they moved into the 'Holylands' (a student area of Belfast) in a semi-commune-squat-like existence, except that they had to pay the rent each week. Still they all embraced the situation in N. Ireland with a sharp observation on the way things were and what we could do about it, it was a kind of hybrid political bastard son of punk rock but with loads of Crass type stencilling on manky looking clothes, covered up with the smell of old Petula oil (if I had to sum it all up). When I first met them, I thought they were all a bunch of pretentious wankers and I had a problem with some of the politics they were supporting but over time, loads of discussions and drinking, I began to understand what they were actually trying to achieve and I bought into that too.

Grub, the bands drummer, looked like and acted like a spiky haired Outcast punk and I got on better with him than Marty Phil or Patsy at that time. Eventually the band decided to kick out Dane one of the two vocalists (the other being Patsy), probably because he was a right fucking pain in the arse and it was suggested that I give vocals a go for them. We went to practice in the upstairs of Du Barry's bar near the docks and famous for 'ladies of the night' selling their goods to passing sailors, which was a dump but cheap



to use.

I think our first rehearsal was a disaster with the guitar too loud, bass too loud and drum kit falling to bits, the vocal PA was shite and the whole messy encounter gave me tinnitus and a migraine. Afterwards, I got to know everyone a bit better and felt a bit more relaxed around the politics of the band. It was interesting times in Belfast with clandestine groups in and around this underground network of punks involved in all sorts of anti-state activities from the ALF to Anti-Nuclear action.

After sustained and determined efforts, we managed to get one good rehearsal under our belts and I really got a buzz for the band. This whole punk network had developed contacts worldwide especially in European countries and I wanted to experience life in a touring band. It was a good but an often-fraught relationship that developed (with Patsy and Phil beating each other up from time to time) between us all and we finally managed to bring out a certain style in the band, though not consciously.

We recorded some tracks for '*The Truth Will Be Heard*' up in Newtownards, which I think Petesy, had organised through Mortarhate (Conflict) and the band had its first record release which help raise a profile. We followed this up with tours around the UK and I started taking on more responsibility for organising things. At this time I had also been involved in various community projects and got involved in the 'Unemployed Centre' in Donegal Street, behind which we later set up Giros and the Warzone collective.

**Lance - Had any of you been in previous bands?**

Roy - I think everyone was in some band before Toxic Waste, I had helped form a band called Wardance but we were shit and I was glad I met up with everyone from Toxic Waste around this time.

**Lance - When the band first come together, was it with the idea of being political/anarcho? Were you all familiar with the politics?**

Roy - I think Patsy was the most 'political' at that time as she was passionate and articulate about who she was and what she believed, however Phil & Marty were central to the concept and politics of the band and all three had a broader view of the political and philosophical challenges we were facing at that time. Both Grub and me were influenced by a narrow view of politics, which possessed more raw emotion rather than intellect. The band was influenced at an early stage by the 'just books' collective and the 'banned' materials which related to the political situation in N. Ireland but also the range of 'anarchist' literature, pamphlets, records, tapes, videos etc which expanded our understanding of the international/global struggles. I think it was down to 'timing' between the desire to speak out and act on the situation we all faced combined with youthful naiveté and a limited but passionate thirst for new information about the world, which influenced the band.

**Lance - What was it like at shows back then? Who were some of the bands you were playing with?**

Roy - The punk scene in Belfast was undergoing a number of changes at that time. Most 'punks' believed that punk was dead and it was time for them to move on which must have been true because they were reading this in the NME and Sounds. However, a new breed of idealistic punkers emerged through the drunken haze of the late 1970's and began to 'think' for themselves. This fostered a DIY culture which in turn helped inspire a whole new scene which again was influenced by bands like Crass, Dirt, Flux of Pink Indians etc. and the lyrics, politics, style had a profound impact on the punk scene in Belfast around the earlier eighties.

Bands from other countries who toured and played included: Crass, Dirt, Rubella Ballet, Buzzcocks, Stranglers, Disorder, Subhumans.

Local bands were: Stiff Little Fingers, Rudi, Outcasts, Stalag 17, Asylum, Paranoid Visions.

**Lance - Was there much of an anarcho scene back then?**

Roy - No, things were in a transitory state between the 'old' punk of the seventies and the 'political' punk of the eighties. There were a lot of old hippies who were organising various events under the banner of 'anarchist' but in reality, they were mostly republicans who had not faced up to the fact at that time. The punk scene in Belfast could not have existed without their input even if it was sporadic, the leftovers from the hippy generation knew how to organise and bring issues into the public domain and still negotiate the sectarian terrain between the Republican and Loyalist paramilitary organisations. I think it is fair to say that most people learned a lot from them at that time but there was always a certain resonance between the these activists and the second generation of punk who rejected the values the hippy's aspired to uphold. Strange how most of the ideological concepts were similar but the approach was so different. The older generation seemed worn out and cynical while the newer punks were full of ideals and inspiration to affect change. I think these differences happen between cultures/subcultures but this was the spark, which identified the anarcho-punk scene in Belfast at that time. A crossover from aesthetic punk into rocket fuelled 'direct action' by the individual in cooperation with like-minded people. What a time that was!

**Lance - In the states, there is little if any information about the troubles in Northern Ireland. There is the talk of it being a religious civil war. Others have a Marxist analysis saying it is based on class and colonialism. What would say was the anarchist position at the time and what were your opinions?**

Roy - The 'anarchist' position at that time was basically to support the nationalist/republican position, however many key people from within these communities spoke out against what was happening at the time and influenced a core theme throughout the Anarcho-punk scene which sought to say fuck the whole lot of them. This was

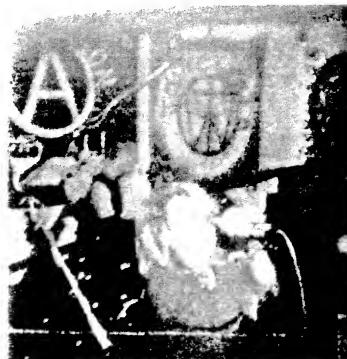
somewhat at odds with the orthodox anarchist ideological position, which was dominated by the left wing politics in mainland Britain and Ireland. I cant explain why it was not a religious war in a paragraph but sufficient to state that religion, politics, history and culture were terms which influenced individual and community politics during the 'troubles' which in itself is a very problematic 'soft' term for armed conflict between a range of diverse groupings, who normally sought inflict pain on anyone that spoke out against or did not support their political position.

**Lance - Do you feel like it was especially dangerous addressing these issues publicly as a band?**

Roy - Punks in Belfast like anywhere else stood out and became easy targets for idiots and aggressors but it would be an over exaggeration to say that it was especially dangerous. I think it may have been portrayed as such by the media who sought to condense the political situation into a binary and oppositional sound bite, which at the time would have sought to make all of us politically impotent. Most punks resisted the whole fucking bunch of them - from the IRA, UDA the cops, the schools, the army the bullyboys etc but I could not say that this was any different from other situations that punks faced elsewhere. However, it did possess a particular underlying sinister characteristic which made addressing such relationships of power somewhat 'tricky' but in keeping with the rest of the populations constant negotiation of the sectarian situation.

**Lance - Did you ever feel like the band was under threat from either civilians or the British presence?**

Roy - Yip! All the time but most of it was misplaced speculation induced by amphetamine sulphate and complimented by a healthy



paranoia, which kept most people out of prison and an early grave. (see The Donegal Street Siege)

**Lance - What form did political action take in such complicated political times?**

Roy - Usual stuff, protests outside the American Embassy, political graffiti, super gluing stuff, opposing stag hunts and hare coursing, making people aware of the situations faced by many political prisoners throughout the world, supporting various issues, organising marches through the city centre, economic sabotage (especially MacDonald's) drinking and talking with people to change their views and then expressing ourselves through lyrics and noise. Organising at a community level, newsheets, advice centres, music projects, printing press, and festivals and at one stage standing for election on the local council as 'the All Night Party'.

**Lance - Do you think that the troubles made political punk more urgent or more relevant or was it the opposite? Did it seem superfluous to sing about animal rights when there were people being killed all the time?**

Roy - No, the definitions of power were similar and in need of resistance and opposition. I don't think I ever recall anyone putting the life of an animal before that of a human being, however, I know of a lot of extremely courageous people who put their lives on the line for what they believed and aspired to change. There was never a distinction made (consciously) by people to uphold animal rights above human rights but I think there was a strong recognition that this unchallenged power relationship was unnecessary and symptomatic of the wider male dominated power relationships which was/is still fucking the world over and therefore the political situations are similar. The 'troubles' conveniently masked (for a while) the bullshit male orientated romantic Irish Nationalism and Unionist triumphalism, which spawned the war we experienced. There was always urgency but that was a punk thing and nothing particular to Belfast, I guess 'speed' had a lot to do with that in the early days.

**Lance - What was your relationship with groups like the Warzone Collective?**

Roy - The Warzone collective did not really exist but the concept allowed for a number of key developments to emerge from Belfast around that time. The bands who were organising at that time brought together a number of key individuals who influenced the political, philosophical and practical development of the Warzone Collective but this was simply a 'flag of convenience' to distinguish the grouping from any politically organised grouping (there were a lot of them around Belfast). The collective was born out of the aspirations of a few individuals who had been influenced by the anarchist movement elsewhere. The collective 'mirrored' actions, politics, and events, which reflected a wider 'collective' approach throughout Ireland, UK, Europe, and USA. The part I played was at an early stage in the formation of the collective but I quickly grew sceptical of the 'conservative' collective approach which many people were advocating at that time and sought to develop projects within various communities which is what I did eventually achieve along with other like minded people many of whom were still part of the Warzone Collective.

**Lance - Could you speak a little about the collective for those who are not familiar?**

Roy - The collective sought to make interventions where possible in a range of political issues, bring people together through the sharing of knowledge, skills and thoughts. Provide an outlet for creative, artistic, and political expression via a range of mediums. Provide support for individuals, bands, and communities to explore

alternative ways of thinking and engage in direct action against those who support injustice and ignored human rights.

Grand in theory - different in practice but the collective sought to in some way challenge the sectarian situation in N. Ireland and particularly in Belfast. It was a loose collection of 'punks' who were either too young to have experienced the Harp Bar and the punk scene of the late 1970's or rejected the philosophies of the earlier punk movement. Compared to places like London or New York, punk in Belfast took on a 'realist' approach rather than an aesthetic or abstract position with people living with and negotiating sectarianism, violence and political injustices who sought to engage with and promote 'alternative' ways of thinking outside of the orange and green politics which dominated our lives. This approach combined with the shitty housing/unemployment situation which saw a general decline of working class areas during the Labour years and then into the Conservative Thatcherite era gave people momentum to organise and resist - the whole fucking lot of them!

**Lance - Did you get to play much outside of Belfast?**

Roy - We played throughout Ireland and across the UK as well as several tours of Northern Europe during the 1980's. We never made to the states as a band but I guess there is still time.

**Lance - Before recording for Mortarhate, had you done many demo recordings?**

Roy - The rest of the band had recorded a number of practice sessions and later we got hold of a four track to record some demo material for tape distribution. At that time it was difficult to access recording facilities as most of the studios were run by tossers who over produced everything so this also inspired us to set up our own practice room and studio which we did at Giro's in Donegal Street.

**Lance - How did the split with Stalag 17 come about? How did you know them?**

Roy - Belfast city had a small population of around 150,000, of those people only a small number were punk, so everyone knew everyone else and generally, it was a small but cohesive community. Petesy Burns from Stalag 17 had been around the early days of punk in the late seventies and he transcended that scene into the 'anarcho-punk scene' of the early eighties. Both Stalag 17 and Toxic Waste were two of the frontrunners for the anarcho scene and so we worked together and were friends with everyone at that time. I guess this was down to both bands enthusiasm to make some change to the deteriorating situation in Belfast, which at that time was experiencing the effects of the Hunger Strikes and the 'Shoot to Kill' policy of the police and army. As Stuart Bailey (music journalist) later commented in the film Big Time, 'the punk scene in Belfast was down to a handful of people who all knew each other' and over all numbers fluctuated around 30-100 people.

It was cosy but dynamic and this led to the split 12" with Stalag 17 on Mortarhate, as we wanted to project unity rather than competition between bands in the Belfast scene.

**Lance - What made you want to record for Mortarhate? How did you know them?**

Roy - Conflict were making headway where Crass had left off and the inclusive nature of the compilation albums allowed for bands like us to get our message out to a wider audience. This was the motivation and a desire to tour. We did not know anyone from Mortarhate at that stage but we were good at making contacts with people and establishing links, which is what happened with Conflict & Mortarhate. It turned out to be a bit of a love/hate relationship but with hindsight the whole scene in the UK was fraught with difficulties in trying to maintain a cohesive network, which 'worked perfectly'



all the time. It did not but many of us were much too idealistic at that point to realise that our dreams and politics may never have the impact we hoped it would. Also we did not understand the realities of the 'business' side of anarcho-punk which seems like a contradiction in terms but only with personal experience I learned that being active cost money and unless you are prepared to front the money yourself you need to find ways of generating and maintaining an income to allow you to keep going. We were young!

**Lance - What was it like recording that record? Were you happy with it?**

Roy - We got a 'deal' with a guy who worked for the BBC and was trying to establish his own recording studio. I do not remember the guys name now but he was OK for BBC. He tried to steer us toward the 'overproduced' version, which he was used to, but we tried to get across some of the aggression and fear through the tracks which I think did not quite work the way we had hoped. However, it was a brilliant experience to know that you could actually form a band and cut your own record and it was not until this project that I realised the potential we all had to make an impact on Belfast/the world.

I could not say that we were happy with it but we could live with it as we did not have the luxury of a record label or loads of money available to pay for the recording. We all chipped in some money and hoped for the best. The record was much more valuable as a mechanism which showed other people that they could do this too – it was DIY not EMI and people sussed that pretty quickly. The tracks were politically motivated and helped create discussion among people especially outside of Belfast in the country areas and small pockets of punks all over the place. After this, we began to organise our own gigs and the whole scene really took off!

**Lance - What were you trying to get across on that record? Which songs were especially important to you?**

Roy - We were trying to engage people in politics which rejected both of the political viewpoints of the nationalists and unionists in N. Ireland. There were left wing and socialist parties in Belfast but we advocated a rejection of the whole lot of them. They were for us the core of the political problem with their dogma and rhetoric which kept us all in line for fear of the unknown. We wanted to explode these myths and challenge them directly rather than through some aesthetic or stylistic resistance – we wanted change for everyone's benefit and the freedom to express ourselves in anyway we saw fit.

**Lance - Did you get to tour much on that record?**

Roy - Yeah, as I said earlier, we managed to get two tours of the UK and later Europe based on that release. We also tried to maintain regular gigs in Ireland north and south to back up any releases we made.

**Lance - Were there many line-up changes over the course of the bands existence?**

Roy - In the early days Dane & Patsy were the vocalists for the band. Then I joined after Dane went to Bristol to live. Later I asked Deno from Dirt to do vocals for us when we toured Europe in 1989. At various stages, we had Petesy on guitar, Dee on bass, and a few people in between on drums. Later this community formed the infamous 'Bleeding Rectum' as an ironic final statement on the punk/metal scene, which had emerged.

**Lance - What was it like on the road with Toxic Waste?**

Roy - Probably the most enjoyable time of my adult life but this had its down side, which I eventually did not cope with very well.

Being on tour was an education, you learned so much about other people and yourself. It shaped my personality and my political thinking. I became aware of the breadth and scope of the political movements in Europe/World and got to experience a wide range of situations I would not have otherwise been exposed to. I have never laughed so much and shared so many tears with so many different people. We found ourselves in numerous bizarre

situations, which are hard to relate to a reader but some of these included:

Strip searching at the German border when the sniffer dog jumped back out of the van because of the stench – we pissed ourselves laughing and the border guards could not comprehend why this was funny – we laughed all the way to Bremen.

In Bremen we were greeted by an over enthusiastic group of punks who gave us a bottle of Tequila and I lost all track of reality, woke up several hours later on the stage with the audience waiting and promptly went into our set. After one song, the audience left the room and we all looked at each other. I thought I had fucked the set up but after a while, we followed the audience upstairs and out of the building.

To a backdrop of a massive firework display, we watched for around an hour or so while a sea of punks confronted a group of hardcore Nazi skinheads who had come to smash up the gig. Someone was passing out acid, which thankfully I declined and was given a perk-me-up instead. We watched in awe as the Bremen punks annihilated the skinheads and were so organised they had dispatch riders on bikes relating information about the developments taking place on this piece of waste ground. This was truly bizarre set against the biggest firework display I have ever seen. When things died down and the all clear was given, we preceded back to the venue and to the downstairs cellar. Crates of beer were loaded at the front of the stage and we played our set, which was brilliant if I say myself. However, the punters wouldn't let us off the stage and we had to play the set all over again but in the end I convinced the crowd that they could sing much better than I could and it turned into a free for all jamming session. Bremen then became this adventure playground, which we inhabited for a few days and left with some of the most poignant memories from all the tours. The people were brilliant, the city was cool, and we never forgot 'Schaslich' who later O'd on some concoction. It was hard to top Bremen but there were a few other events along the way.

Amsterdam – we were asked to play this guys wedding reception in a squat called 'the Rat' I think we got too stoned and the guy was pissed off. Later we were robbed while all of us – yes, all eight people slept in the van. We think someone introduced some sleeping gas and ripped off everything we had from a bag I kept everything in, passports, money, socks – the lot!

Antwerp – when the punks in Antwerp heard about the robbery they put on a gig for us in 'De Waag' and did a collection. They raised enough to get us back home and I we never forgot their solidarity – I eventually went there to live!

France – we were headed back home late from a gig in Liege to the ferry terminal. It was foggy and everyone was asleep. I was driving and the roads were empty. I drove past what looked like a shape at the edge of the road but decided to continue. However, a nagging feeling got the better of me and I did a U turn on the carriageway and drove a few miles back up to the spot. After a short while, we came across a old couple that had veered off the road and into ditch. We got them out of the car safely and calmed them down. Later we all pulled their car back onto the dual carriageway and sorted them out. They could not speak a word of English and our French was bad. They kept thanking us and saying that the 'English' were their friends. We did not have the heart to explain that we were from Irlande du Nord! They tried to give us money but we eventually accepted several kisses on the cheek and headed for the ferry.

Finally, there was the 'Donegal Street Siege' when we were all arrested in Belfast for 'inciting a riot'. I wrote an article for 'It makes you want to Spit' which describes the events in detail but this was the scariest moment for us as a band and later we were given a death warning by a paramilitary organisation for our Daniel O'Donnell Must Die Tour. Kept us on our toes!

**Lance - Were you aware of the Exeter band called Toxic Waste who changed their name to The Waste?**

Roy - Not at the time, but later I became aware of them and there is another band in France called Toxic Waste too. I always thought it was a shit name for a band but these things stick with you once you have started. I joined after the name was decided but it rather grows on you!

**Lance - How did the "Belfast" LP come about? Why didn't you do it with Mortarhate again?**

Roy - Umm, the Mortarhate relationship deteriorated with the release of 'The Battle Continues' single, which was meant to be a fundraiser for the Warzone Collective who were struggling at that point. The collective (as far as I am aware) never received anything from the label and this set a rot into people's minds including myself about the nature of the anarcho-scene in the UK. There was a lot of anti-Conflict feeling generated and myself and Petesy tried to sort things out with Jungle Records who were Mortarhate's distributors. Eventually nothing really came of this but the damage had been done. People became really cynical and apathetic. Many people drifted into other activities, not just because of this but the whole atmosphere at the time was changing and people in Belfast felt that they had been shafted! Therefore, that is why we did not release the record on Mortarhate at that time. Subsequently the relationship with Conflict was mended along the way but I do not think anyone really trusted record labels ever again – even if they were associated with the anarcho scene.

The Belfast LP was meant to be a finishing of unfinished business as by now the band had split and we never recorded a lot of our stuff, so I decided to do just that and put the band to rest for myself. It did not quite work out like that, as (Toxic Waste II) ended up on yet another tour of Europe and I had a hard time trying to distribute the record by myself.

**Lance - What was the label that put this LP out?**

Roy - There was no label, I just called it Belfast records because that was convenient. I think I may have entertained the notion of starting my own record label at that point but that quickly faded when I realised what this actually meant.

**Lance - What was it like recording this time around? Were you happy with it?**

Roy - I think it was easier working with Deno and some friends at that time because I knew what I wanted to record and it was really just a case of trying to get the sound right. I was not happy with the finished album but I can still live with it like the other recordings. I never really understood until it was too late that the best people to record their own material are the band itself. Marty the guitarist from Toxic Waste was excellent at all of this and knew the technology. When you hire a studio you need to ensure the engineer is on your wavelength. With this album, he was not and so things were overproduced again. The Toxic edge is missing but otherwise I believe it is still a good album, which reflects changes and developments.

**Lance - Why did you want to call the record "Belfast"? Aside from your hometown, what was the relevance in calling your LP that?**

Roy - I was living with Richard the bass player from Dirt in a squat down near Brixton in London and I often felt homesick for the place and the people of Belfast. I did not realise at the time I would be living there again so soon otherwise I might have called the album 'Andalus Road'.

**Lance - What were some of the highlights of that period?**

Roy - My son being born, and moving back home. I later joined up with Marty and formed Bleeding Rectum as the last word on what was happening in Belfast at that time – as I said before everyone in the scene felt they were being shafted and we kind of captured that sentiment. It was ironic, self-debasing, and fun!

The other great development at that time was the Belfast gig collective who organised really cool concerts one of my favourites was the Neurosis gig at the Crescent Arts Centre – life changing stuff!

**Lance - What are your favourite parts of that record?**

Roy - I like 'Dear Little Dinosaur' and 'Plastic Bullets', which the rest of the band did not particularly like when we played live. My 12-string intro to Belfast was a poetic interpretation of my feelings about the place and the fact that I actually managed to put the record out by myself.

**Lance - Your last release was a split with LP with Stalag 17 again and a group called Asylum. First off, who was Asylum?**

Roy - The split with Stalag and Asylum came earlier in the eighties as a joint venture around the Warzone Collective, so the Belfast Album came after.

Asylum was: Big Paul, Brain, Chuck and Spike the 'provie from around the Holylands. They were shit hot and could have gone on to bigger and better things but with many bands in Belfast they found it hard, to keep going without a regular income and people drifted. Brian and big Paul lived up at Fleskwater farm in a commune for a while, Chuck found smack and Spike found Joan his future partner.

**Lance - How did this record come about? Why did you want to do a compilation instead of your own record?**

Roy - Again, it was solidarity for a scene rather than join in the ego bullshit of being the best band, we were sick of that and we had fun at each other's gigs so it just made sense to collaborate on any record releases. More people got to hear of all three bands and the Warzone collective showed that we could work together and produce our own work the way we wanted.

**Lance - What were your favourite moments of this record?**

Roy - Petesy's thought provoking lyrics from Stalag 17 and the awesome musical talent of Asylum were inspirational, Toxic Waste were not bad either!

**Lance - Who did release this record?**

Roy - This went out through Jungle Records

**Lance - Why did the band split up?**

Roy - The original line-up split because at that time in Belfast, there was a lot of tension around the punk scene and this took its toll on each of us at differing times. It was hard to maintain a personal life and a collective life and when both were intertwined this usually made for quite a cocktail of personal and political and often it was hard to distinguish between both. Patsy (vocals) left first and headed for the quiet life in the Irish countryside. Then Phil (Bass player) went to Bristol (I think) but when he came back to Belfast things were quite different. Grub (Drummer) disappeared off the scene and that left myself and Marty (Guitar) doing other projects.

I don't really think the band 'split up' more like we kind of slowly disintegrated and along the way lots of things changed for everyone.

**Lance - Did anyone go on to play in other groups?**

Roy - I do not think Patsy, Grub, or Phil went on with any other bands but Marty and I had a number of encounters:

Marty went on to join 'Pink Turds in Space' and played in a few other bands for fun. Both of us joined forces for 'Bleeding Rectum' and I played for a few bands while living in London but nothing worth a mention here.

**Lance - How do you reflect on your time with the band?**

Roy - Some regrets that we did not realise our full potential in fact, we had only got started, and everything disintegrated. Understanding that we existed in a truly remarkable period in a particularly difficult environment politically and this took its toll on people in different ways. Memories of personal differences with people which went too far which should have been resolved at an earlier stage. Images of some of the most wonderful people on the planet that we met and shared time with. Periods when the whole thing became a drunken blur and not so productive. A great sense of achievement that I was part of the ongoing development of Punk in the 1980's and the fun times we all had playing pranks and fucking with the system. Sincere regret that I was the one who tore the last page out of Dougie Jameson's book 'The Ragged Trouser Philanthropist' while

we were on tour in Europe and I think this had a devastating effect on his future politics (sorry Dougie).

#### Lance - How do you reflect on anarcho punk in general?

Roy - I think we all must be the type of people who just wont take shit from anyone without some form of resistance and when you get a whole generation who learned from the early punk days that everything was possible then remarkable changes take place in people's lives which have a profound affect on global cultures usually in small ways but this can also manifest itself in massive demonstrations of resistance against those who dominate and control much of our daily life.

I believe anarcho-punk became the intellectual side of punk, which progressed from the raw emotion, and observational side of the early punk movement. Anarcho-punk got right into the cracks and chipped away slowly methodically and in the words of Terri Hooley 'punk never died in Belfast it still exists and is a mindset of the people'. I believe this is true and that 'anarcho-punk' is a difficult term to explain just like 'truth' or 'culture' it has many possible interpretations. What anarcho-punk allowed us all to do was to embrace this 'mind-set' and to live out our lives in various ways with an underlying understanding that we can make a difference and that it's OK to get depressed or burned out now and again, no one is perfect and neither is the concept. However, we also have learned that when we do organise and work together then we can affect real change locally, nationally and internationally and that we can do this without any political party having control over us.

For me personally, the whole punk/anarcho-punk call it what you wish has been and still is an effective way to counter the shit we are forced to deal with all over the planet. Now that I am in a different social and cultural environment outside of N. Ireland, I can see how important we all were but that sadly (in my own opinion) the political situation now (under the terms of the peace process) has canonised the sectarian culture with the state recognising and rewarding those people who have caused immense pain and numerous deaths which has affected so much of the population. This legitimisation of the 'terrorist' means that any sane and reasonable voice of opposition is easily sidelined and if ever there was a time when N. Ireland needed some help out of the shit - it is now 2005!

The world has bought into the notion that peace exists in N. Ireland while the reality is so very different. The atmosphere and politics is a reminder of the bad old days in the 1970's when you were either a 'prod' or a 'taig'. Many left wing organisations and liberal thinking activists embraced the surge of support that Sinn Fein has capitalised on. This culture can only fuel a binary response from the protestant/unionist/loyalist communities, which will in turn perpetuate the sectarian hatred and underlying culture of distrust, which exists. We were able to actively resist this situation because punk offered an alternative but now the situation has changed.

I still believe that any form of resistance against both sets of bigots and ideologies is valid and worth pursuing but I guess many of us who began that journey are now working on their own in different ways which suits the changes in their personal and private lives. I am saddened that much of our efforts have now disintegrated just as Toxic Waste did way back in the eighties. The Warzone Collective is gone, Giro's is closed, and the punk scene is back to organising ad hoc events in various pubs around the city centre. There are and recently have been some great bands emerge from the punk scene in Belfast and I hope that people there can find a way to reinvigorate the scene once again. I wish them every success.

#### Lance - Anything else?

Roy - Yeah a short rant! punk is not a substitute for getting up off your arse and making a contribution to this world, that is something we should all aspire to as human beings. It does not matter that you do not succeed in everything you set out to do and it really does

not matter what others may think of you so long as you can live with yourself. I was never someone who went along with the crowd and this applies to the punk scene too! There is no uniform, code or proper punk way to look, think or act, just how every individual makes a unique contribution or act of resistance which helps shape their own and others lives.

The real strength is in the persistence of this way of thinking, finding new ways to adapt or subtly make changes and the potential for new generations to pick up where others have left off – 'punk's not dead' and it never will die so long as the concept works on an individual level!

Like many other people I too have finally embraced the new technologies and designed a website which allows for anyone interested in Toxic Waste to read various articles, access materials and soundtracks and opens up a new link to an old period of punk. If anyone is interested perhaps, you could point them to: [www.toxicwastebelfast.com](http://www.toxicwastebelfast.com)

## MUSIC REVIEWS

### A TOUCH OF HYSTERIA "s/t" 12"

I guess there isn't really that much point in me reviewing this limited to 200 EP as if you don't have it you probably never will. This isn't a scum pit thing so much as it's a tribute to their late drummer, Chris, and really only meant for genuine fans of the band.

The five tracks are, from what I gather, what should have been their EP on All The Madmen back in the '80s. It's fantastically melodic, very well recorded, and full of energy. In a lot of ways, it's the perfect link between the Mob and Thatcher On Acid. That makes it all the more tragic that All The Madmen ran out of gas and were never able to release this material.

You would have to be pretty low to sell this record on Ebay (or any auction site) so you hopefully won't be finding this record for sale. Maybe if there is enough interest there will be a bigger pressing.

(Demo Tapes)

### APOCALYPSE / TRANSGRESSION split 7"

First of all, I've never really listened to the Transgression side. I've heard it like once and wasn't too psyched and went back to Apocalypse.

I loved the guys in Apocalypse. Rich and Ralph were good guys and this is one of those records that I was really stoked to get a shout out in the thanks list. Two really down to Earth guys, one was clearly the political voice of the band, the other was the social guy who could hang out in any crowd. I don't understand why everyone is so reverent of Iconoclast (who were a great band) while nobody remembers Apocalypse.

This is by far their finest moment. Better songs than the tracks on their own single or the one on the MRR comp, this is how I remember them live. Blindingly fast riffs with giant mid tempo breaks all held together by guttural vocals. The cover proclaims "noise from hell!"

I wonder what these guys are up to today.

(Cide-Show/Desperate Attempt)

### ARMITAGE SHANKS "Sing And Play Twenty Punk Hits Of The Seventies" LP

These guys can fucking play. It's like they're taking the spirit of the Hamburg era Beatles and applying it to 77 punk. This record is full of the kind of punk you wanna hear down the pub with your friends. It's like they're playing them from memory as well. They don't get every chord right. But they play with such conviction and speed that it all comes together. From the hits (The Clash, X-Ray Spex, The Damned) to the somewhat unknown (Johnny Moped, Protex) to the totally obscure (the Killjoys, Alberto Y Lost Trio Paranoias). It's all fed into their punk wood chipper and comes out fantastic (Vinyl Japan)

#### BAD RELIGION "Into The Unknown" LP

I'm not sure why everyone was so shocked when this record came out. Way previous to it's release, Bad Religion were involved with a compilation in conjunction with Destroy LA fanzine. In just a few months, a lot of the original SoCal hardcore bands were trying to legitimize their music by straying musically in every direction. Channel 3 started doing Aerosmith songs as did Symbol Six. The Circle Jerks were doing all sorts of rock-n-roll with the occasional hardcore to pay the bills. Black Flag were off on their own idiosyncratic trajectory. Bad Religion did an especially nasty interview for Destroy LA talking about the ignorant hardcore kids and how they were trying something new on their second album. That album was the much-maligned "Into The Unknown".

First of all, over the eight songs, only Greg Graffin and Mr. Brett return from "How Can Hell Be Any Worse?" Aside from the instruments you expect, you also get acoustic guitars, piano, keyboards and synths, wood blocks... It's pretty crazy and at times it does sound a little like a lo-fi Emerson, Lake and Palmer on speed. But Graffin's voice is as strong as on any record. The lyrics are still smart if a bit more imaginative (aren't you sick of hearing that? "Oh, Bad Religion are so smart. Those guys have PhDs. They are so darn smart." Fuck off!). Going faux prog didn't mean they lost their tunes. I think "Chasing The Wild Goose" stands the test of time. Plus, it's dedicated to Vonnegut! Nerds!

(Epitaph Records)

#### BUSH TETRAS "Boom In The Night" CD

I used to read about these post-punk, post-no wavers long before I ever got to hear them. I was afraid of singer Cynthia Sley. She seemed so tough and larger than life.

Their music, a hybrid of funky rhythms and bass parts with raunchy guitars and poetic vocals, was both dark and upbeat. Only in post-punk can such a thing exist. The funk was totally irresistible while the mood was foreboding. The guitars could give it the no wave blast of white noise and could also pick out some effect ridden gothic lines. In some ways they married the post-punk of the Modettes with the sophisticated dance of Pigbag.

Lots of fun stuff, but the really out there upbeat punky numbers are the most moving like "You Taste Like The Tropics", "Dum Dum" and their hit "Too Many Creeps". Erase Errata fans, take note as this will go nicely along with your Slits and Raincoats records.

(ROIR)

#### CLASH, THE "Death Or Glory" LP

Back before the recent glut of Clash bootlegs, I was a bit of a collector. While legit Clash rarities have gone far out of my price range (last time I saw a copy of the Spanish "Complete Control" pic sleeve, it was closing in on three figures on Ebay), some of the first generation of boots are still fun to track down. By first generation, I mean the ones that came out while the band were still active.

This nice looking LP is made up of three different recordings. The first side is all from a 1982 Tokyo show. Most of the second side comes from the Jamaica World Music Festival from 1983. I bought this record largely because I wanted to hear what they would do with the more produced "Sandinista" stuff live. Between the two recordings there are interesting versions of "Washington Bullets", "Ivan Meets GI Joe" and "Junco Partner". It's pretty cool to hear guitar-ed out versions of those numbers. To some people, "Sandinista" seemed like a band living beyond their means. These live recordings make me wonder what would have happened if the band had gone in and recorded it all in the spirit of "London Calling". The LP closes with two tracks of Strummer singing with the Pogues and a live "Tommy Gun" from some TV show none of which is very exciting.

(Leviathan Multi-Media Company)

#### CODE OF HONOR / SICK PLEASURE split LP

I love hardcore bands doing split records. I love the Faith / Void

split I love the Concrete Sox / Heresy split. I love this record so much. To this day, both sides totally hold up. Okay, first there was Sick Pleasure. Niki Siki and crew put out a great 7" and this side Totally fucking snotty punk that was the template for everyone from the Dwarves to Blatz. I love that it's so violently anti-civic pride with my favorite song of theirs, "Let's Kill The MUNI Driver"

Once Niki Siki split, the band regrouped with a new singer under the name Code Of Honor. They had some other stuff, but nothing as good as this recording. Skater dudes from the time of Action Now, they went political and everything went haywire. It's a little confused but amazing all the same. Their theme song has some of the best phrasing in all punk rock. "Your self-determination is more important than your life!" Fuck yeah!

(Subterranean Records)

#### CONCRETE SOX "Your Turn Next" LP

Okay, stay with me now. Concrete Sox were the Mudhoney of the '80s UK thrash scene. Remember when Mudhoney came out and everyone thought they were gonna be the next big thing? For a while, they were the hottest SubPop band. They're still my fave of the original SubPop stable. But all of a sudden they got run out of town by the Nirvana-machine. Ditto for Concrete Sox.

This is the album that really brought that scene to international attention. Children of the Revolution were doing some interesting things and there were rumors of this back to basic hardcore scene happening. Then this album came out and it was everywhere. Awesome stripped down lyrics with a heavy animal rights angle, they were born out of the scene that produced Conflict, the Sears and Anti-Cimex (all bands they namecheck on the thanks list). The cover depicts a fox aiming for revenge on a hunter. They were taking a musical form that had otherwise become more and more thug-like and macho, giving it an intelligent edge that answered a lot of people that couldn't get with '80s straight edge policies though maybe couldn't get with Chumbawamba's music either. It's a ferocious record that, in retrospect, is not nearly as metal as people claimed. It's sort of the epitome with the genre. It even starts with a sample from "Suspiria" and has an awesome shitty collage on the lyric sheet!

Within a year, Concrete Sox would be overshadowed by the first Napalm Death effort. But they remained a solid band through the good and bad times with this as a powerful starting point.

(C.O.R. Records)

#### CONFlict "Last Hour" 12"

A lot of people forget that in the early '80s, there were two bands called Conflict. One American, one British, they both were mining similar political areas and similar musical approaches. As far as I know, this is the only 12" from the American band. Fuck, why won't someone reissue this amazing record?

Out of the unlikely city of Tucson, the band was made up of two asian-american women on vocals and bass and two dudes on guitar and drums. Musically, it was practically OC style hardcore with elements of LA's Wasted Youth, TSOL and maybe even Sin 34. It's great thrash, dead production, played like they're about the fall apart. That alone makes this record worth hunting down. But it's the crazy vocals and lyrics that put it over the top for me. Singer K. Nurse, was singing about stuff that nobody was singing about in '82. Lesbianism, date rape, there's a lot going on here and it's all written about with a unique, imagistic style.

Man, I just love reading these old thanks lists. There's a long one on this record, but it's a lot of fun. From the obvious and cool like the Big Boys, Really Red, Battalion of Saints, Effigies Government Issue, Scream, DOA, Channel 3, Die Kreuzen, to others lost in time like Civil Death, Double Cross, Constant Cause, Tunnel Dogs, etc.

(Unjust Records)

#### CONFUSE "Nuclear Addicts" 7"

CONFUSE "Contempt For Authority" 7"

#### CONFUSE "Spending Loud Night" 7"

Ah, 1985! What a great year to be into hardcore. Every other day, you would eagerly check your mailbox for some new amazingness to be thrust into your life. Imagine seeing the craziest photos of Japanese hardcore bands in MRR and having to wait to hear what they sounded like. No band satisfied like Confuse. Crazy-ass Discharge and Disorder influenced hardcore that looked as good as it sounded. In 1985, the crusty nightmare hadn't really manifested itself yet, so Confuse looked really crazy.

Like their spiritual predecessors, Execute, their first release to make it (just barely) out of Nippon was a flexi. The seven song "Nuclear Addicts" is as insane and uncompromising today as the day it came out. The buzz saw guitars screech almost reminiscent of the scalpel blade effect on the first Disorder full length. The drums sound nearly tribal, they're so primitive and forceful. There are some real, though surely coincidental, comparisons to Iconoclast but with a more guttural approach to vocals. From "Indignation" to "The End", the record never lets up and doesn't have a bad moment.

1985's "Contempt For Authority" finds the band getting their shit more organized. It loses some of the unstable ferocity of the first release. But it's still powerful hardcore. Just this time around, the songs are a bit more discernable. The guitars are still a beautiful white noise that at times don't even sound like proper chords. Whereas on the first record, each song just sounds like a near spontaneous burst of energy, this four-song EP is more, I wouldn't say melodic...

Two years later the band came up with "Spending Loud Night", the rawest of their records. It seems to be the band's earliest recordings with the studio date in 1983. One mid-tempo track, "Merciless Game", has a secretly melodic bass-line bringing to mind, of all things, "Psycho Candy" era Jesus And Mary Chain. It's the kind of record that is brutal enough to please the hardcore kids with enough pure noise to impress the experimental set.

Some five years later, the band got back together to record the "Stupid Life" 12". But it's just sort of lame rock. It doesn't even slightly resemble the original band.

Confuse have been booted to death. Some of them are pretty dodgy. As a rule of thumb, the 7" boots aren't too good while the 12"s are good enough. Obviously, they were mastered off of vinyl. But let's face it; it's fine. This isn't the kind of music that needs a 12-band EQ, right?

(Blue Jug, Confuse Records, King's World)

#### CULTURE "Two Sevens Clash" LP

Certainly one of the true reggae classics, this record is full of brightly produced catchy music. Along with the famous title track, you've also got equally great tunes like "Calling Rasta Far I" and "Get Ready To Ride The Lion To Zion". It's sweet music with brilliant production and possibly the best record associated with Sly and Robbie.

But it is the title song that moves me the most. While this record is straight outta Kingston, the title track is the sound of London. On my first trip to London, I went wandering around Brixton. I was looking for cool shops, for tapes, whatever, right? I just remember walking around the markets and suddenly hearing this song coming over the speakers. It seemed like a perfect moment. It's probably got something to do with the Clash and the Slits. But I'm always gonna think of "Two Sevens Clash" as the soundtrack of London.

(Lightning Records)

#### DAWSON "Barf Market: You're Ontae Plums" LP

Before you had your Lung Leg, Dick Johnson, and Pink Kross, you had the amazing Dawson. Glasgow's premier noise wavers are often forgotten in conversations about the Ex, Gang Of Four, the Pop Group... But their debut album in 1990 is as solid as most of those groups records.

Of the bands I mentioned, Dawson were surely closer in sound to the Ex or especially pre-Ex commies, the Rondos. Ten

tracks on side one and eight on the other, it's a relentless attack that goes also seems to spring from the Ex style political rantings. It all sounds quite brilliant as well.

If you are a fan of those earliest recordings of the Ex (and I can't imagine that you aren't) than this record is well worth tracking down. All of the band's output was great. But this is the most well-rounded effort.

(Gruff Witt Records)

#### DEAD MILKMEN, THE "Bucky Fellini" LP

I was never a huge fan of this band like a lot of my friends were. In fact, like those oddballs that only liked the Mick Jones songs, I really only love the songs Joe Jack Talcum sung. Everyone loved "Bitchin' Camaro" on the first record. But I always thought "Dean's Dream" was the classic.

So this is, what, the third album? I don't even remember. The second one had "Why Are You A Moron" so this is at least number three. There's the normal funny business like "Going To Graceland" and "The Pit". This record also contains my favorite Dead Milkmen song of all. "Watching Scotty Die" is a really great song that probably wasn't a hit with their snotty punk suburban fan base. But it's a great sad song with all the charm of one of Jonathan Richman's more sullen moments. Recorded in Austin, maybe the time they spent hanging out with Daniel Johnston had some influence (they even cover "Rocketship"). This is one of the songs that helped me learn to love the fiddle.

(Enigma Records)

#### DEEP PURPLE "Made In Japan" 2xLP

I love Deep Purple. Richie Blackmore is one of my main guitar heroes. You can keep your fucking Sabbath's and Zep's and whatever UK '70s hard rock you listen to. For me it was Deep Purple all the way and this record is their finest moment.

Look, this whole seven song double LP is fucking great. "Child In Time" is fucking insane and I even enjoy that tired old "Smoke On The Water". But the one song that is totally worth the entry fee is "Highway Star". A great moment on the "Machine Head" LP, it's a whole new thing live. That song exemplifies at how ferocious the band must have been at that time. They're playing the song at breakneck speed and not missing a phrase. The drums are insane, the keyboard solo is fantastic and the bass is fucking flowing. Gillan belts out the notes that might have got him the "Jesus Christ Superstar" gig. But most of all, the solo is amazing. Blackmore lets go like never before perfectly blending lightning fast classical passages with Hendrix-like blues breaks to form a solo that's both unusual and jaw-droppingly complex at the same time. This guy was the king.

(Warner Brothers)

#### ESSENTIAL LOGIC "Fanfare In The Garden" 2xCD

Essential Logic seem like the missing link to me. Well, I guess they are one of many. But they are the clearest link between the X-Ray Spex and the first generation of punk and the evolutionary leap of post-punks like Delta 5 or the Modettes. It's almost a cliché. By cliché I mean that it's almost ridiculous to lump all those groups together and I would hate to think that it was simply because they all had women and I'm just unimaginative. No, I think there is something that runs through these bands in particular that unites them and being women is nothing to overlook.

How do you describe a group without relying on either comparison to groups fairly unrelated or flowery adjectives that don't communicate any real information? Essential Logic were the band that Lora Logic started after splitting the X-Ray Spex after blasting her sax on the classic "Oh Bondage, Up Yours!" which was one of my favorite songs in my youth. I couldn't find that record, so I would wait through two-hours of KTUH's punk and new wave show until I heard it. I finally had to buy the "Rock Against Racism" LP to find it in Hawaii.

Essential Logic don't sound like the X-Ray Spex. They are a totally mixed bag of styles and approaches all genetically

mutated to become their own unique thing. There is a clear sense of what was happening in post-punk with the skronky guitars and horns. There is the troubled rhythms that fluctuate between death disco-fucked funk and reflective non-Euro traditions. To say they were influenced by African rhythms and percussion is probably going too far. But they were clearly hearing more swinging styles and as a result were always pushing their technical ability. The end result was a mish-mash of successes and failures that became a fully realized vision.

Get it? It's definitely dance music. But it's art too. With Essential Logic you don't have to choose and this retrospective feels less like a museum and more like a learning curve.

(Kill Rock Stars)

FAITH/VOID split 12"

FAITH "Subject To Change" 12"

When the Faith/Void split came out, it seems like everyone took sides. It was one or the other. Me and my friends went with Faith. In fact, I don't think I listened to the Void side more than a couple of times. It just seemed so sloppy. I probably thought it was too metal at the time. The Faith side still sounds great to me if not a lot rough than I remember. "It's Time" is like their theme song. Along with Marginal Man, this was a big transitional album for me with the angry guy hardcore lyrics that typified the first wave getting slowly replaced by equally angry, but more introspective words.

Faith's only other record was "Subject To Change" and it furthers the ideas of the debut. The first wave East Coast hardcore is still there but with open chords and melodic parts that would later define the two bands that came out of Faith's split: Rites of Spring and Ignition. "Aware" is a fantastic opener with Alec setting the pace with manic vocals somewhere between brother Ian and Crucifix. The chorus of "Untitled" is an unusual sing-along that sounds like Government Issue trying to work out something by the Byrds. It's a real shame that this band didn't do more.

(Dischord Records)

FINANCIAL PANTHER "s/t" CD

Phoenix and its 'burbs (Tempe, Mesa, etc.) have always had a surprisingly diverse and totally ignored music scene. From the days of JFA to Hippycore and Stinkweeds to newer groups like Financial Panther, the music scene has always had one foot in the international music community and one in its own idiosyncratic local trajectory.

Financial Panther certainly have elements of Jehu or Garden Variety on their second album. There is some guitar interplay that takes me back (but not too far back) with lots of memorable riffs that blend together into one long swirling piece of music. The stop starts... The minor keys... The shout-sung vocals. Does anyone remember another really underrated band called Bob Evans? Fucking excellent if you were lucky enough to be a part of it.

Ditto for this band. They're gone by now. But it's great that the music is at least documented on disc. The production is half slick and half raw like the bands I mentioned. On the one hand, it's not some lo-fi recording. But the feeling is raw enough to even slightly capture a live feel.

(emodreamo@yahoo.com)

FREE SPIRITS "Out Of Sight And Sound" LP

What the fuck is this record all about? I dunno. But I love it. I guess when people say "jazz rock" you expect the most mundane form of fusion. I mean, there's good fusion... I guess. But there's a lot of not good fusion. Right? So what the fuck is this?

Imagine if the jazz and rock interface happened before acid rock or the 70s guitarization of the western world. In fact, this could have more to do with jazz meeting pop music culture more so than rock. If it weren't for the amazing performances, the imaginative arrangements and the fascinating instrumentation (sitar, saxophones as well as the usual suspects)... If you strip away all that stuff, you get something almost like the Association or something

But you juxtapose those things and you get something wholly different. "Don't Look Now" is a fantastic pop song that is totally subverted by the wild sax. "Sunday Telephone" is the same with its great quasi or proto-psych pop. This is like a '60s pop record for brainiacs.

(ABC Records)

GENERATION X "s/t" LP

GENERATION X "Valley Of The Dolls" LP

GENERATION X "Kiss Me Deadly" LP

A lot of young kids brought up on Weezer, Green Day and the like must be really startled if they even bother to do the smallest amount of historical investigation. Those interested in the history of punk are often left feeling a little empty when finally hearing the music of originators like the Sex Pistols, the Clash or the New York Dolls. Those bands had at least some notion about the "rock" in "punk rock" where as today there's more of an interest in the "pop" or "pop punk". I'm not necessarily making a value judgment. I just don't think there is as much of a musical connection between the Pistols and the Clash with the new generation as there is a connection with the class of '78. Lead by the Buzzcocks, modern pop punk owes more to them and a few others: Stiff Little Fingers, Generation X.

That first album is the only one that official music history will even acknowledge exists. It's a great pop punk record. It's loud, obnoxious within very clear and safe parameters and is as melodic as an American sports anthem. You can't fight it. Try and you won't win. "Ready Steady Go"? It's a bunch of shit, right? Punks saying they like the Beatles and Dylan? What the fuck? They even cover a John Lennon song with zero irony. But it's great. Billy Idol has a perfect voice that is deep but not too deep and raspy but not too raspy. The fact that there is some great guitar playing and an unrelenting rhythm section makes this record like a bubblegum punk masterpiece.

Fuck "Valley of the Dolls", right? The guys that we never really thought of as punk went ahead and made a record that wasn't punk! Okay, confused punk purist logic aside, was a disastrous gamble taken by a band that would never escape its punk roots. For their second album, the band tries out a pseudo-glam approach utilizing Ian Hunter as producer. The result is pretty hit or miss though not nearly as bad as was initially thought. Yeah, they look fucking stupid. But they always looked fucking stupid. They were a dumb looking band. The high points of the record still shine years later. "King Rocker" is as solid as anything on the first album. It almost seems out of place. The opening track, "Running With The Boss Sound" has some monstrous and loud guitar work that covers a song written in the spirit of some of the best early Springsteen anthems.

"Kiss Me Deadly" was the third album and barely connected to Generation X. With the drummer and guitarist splitting, the group goes through the punk alumni to fill out with record with ex-Clash Terry Chimes on drums and Steve Jones adding some guitars. Along with some pretty tame sounding '80s rock were a few great tunes. The first mix of "Dancing With Myself" starts it off with Steve Jones's guitar beefing up the future MTV hit. Some pretty guitar playing ostensibly from Billy Idol colors the "Heavens Inside" and "Stars Look Down" is also quite catchy.

The first album is the classic. Whether you get the US or UK versions there are some great songs. While the second and third records certainly don't match the glory of the debut and have flaws they really aren't the disasters history has made them out to be.

(Chrysalis)

GOOD RIDDANCE "My Republic" CD

We actually played with Good Riddance a long, long time ago. This must have been 1994 or something at Gilman. They were some new group from Santa Cruz. I remember them doing a cover of "I Melt With You" or something like that.

In more recent years I've grown to appreciate this group

and what they're about. I know that for a lot of people they are the quintessence of what they don't like about Fat Wreck. But for me it's just the opposite. They are everything I love about that label. I always enjoyed their high spirited melodic punk. I mean, they are a pop punk band. I know that everyone hates that label. But they are an example of how that can be a good thing. I really got hooked when I heard "One For The Braves". What a great song!

So, I get a lot of the Fat stuff for free. It's nice. This is a good one. Ridiculous production that takes all the things I like about the Fat/Epitaph sound but adds a lot more warmth. How do they do it? Bill Stevenson must really know something because Motor Studios ain't that amazing.

Lots of good high speed stuff here. But my personal faves are the more mid-tempo melodic tunes. "Texas" and "Shame" are especially great.

([www.fatwreck.com](http://www.fatwreck.com))

GORILLA ANGREB "Bedre Tider" 12"

First listen and I sort of thought this record kinda sucked. It seemed so powerless and half-assed compared to the energy of their previous recordings. But I gave it some time, came back and really absorbed it. Now it might be my favorite Gorilla Angreb recording.

I think I read a review that Paul wrote in MRR saying that it was the first record of theirs where he really noticed the X influence. I guess I see that to. The first song has a "Real Child Of Hell" type riff and the downbeat guitar riff of the second song can't help but be a reference to "Los Angeles", right? Did the band read any of their own press and let that influence them? Either way it sounds good and they ultimately don't sound anything like X. What I mean to say is that the singers don't sound anything like John Doe or Exene. They've got their own thing and their own odd but engaging harmonies going on. The loose phrasing of the back-up vocals are almost reminiscent of the Au Pairs where as the main vocals are more in the Euro punk tradition of Life... But How To Live It.

Five solid tracks on this record on really nice vinyl. Funky cover art of black humor and sentimentality. I hope they never sing in English. They should be the biggest thing ever. But I kind of hope they stay the underground's best kept secret.

(Feral Ward)

HAMPTON GREASE BAND "Music To Eat" 2xLP

Before I heard this record I had read so much about how the band would just go out live and make totally improvised noise and how this record was inspired but totally unlistenable. So I was sort of expecting something really crazy and atonal. But that's not the case at all. In fact this is a really pretty record especially "Halifax" that crushes a lot of different elements together. There is a lot of riffing and improvising. But it's within a very clear framework. It's in some ways like a much more loose and aggro version of the Doors at their peak. Other extended breaks take more of an Allman Brothers blues exploration. There's a weirdness in the songwriting that comes somewhere between Don Van Vliet and the Bonzo Dog Band or even the Turtles.

It's easy to see why there are a lot of Beefheart comparisons. Singer Bruce Hampton is like a tenor version with a lot of those shit in the throat type tones but without the baritone rumble. But the complexity of the arrangements has more to do with the whole group tightly moving from one time signature to the next as opposed to Beefheart who at their wildest layered  $\frac{3}{4}$  over 4/4 over whatever came up mathematically correct. As a result, this is in some ways potentially more accessible than say "Trout Mask Replica". But this is still far from commercial. It's wild and random with three tracks closing in around 20 minutes each. No potential singles here. But to really "get it" if you choose to, and it's worth the journey, you really need to hear it all in one sitting sort of like how you can't just check out part of "Free Jazz". You need to make it the soundtrack of your life for a day or two to really absorb this shit.

(Columbia)

HARD SKIN "We Are The Wankers" 7"

Hard Skin are back with more music, ridiculously melodic, unbearably funny and surprisingly together sounding. Released in conjunction with their last Japan Tour (what a cheeky way of getting overseas!) the three new classics are the title track, 'Egg Fried Rice' and 'Fat Bob The Builder'.

The funny thing is, the more they try to look sloppy, the nicer their record covers get. This is a really good looking 7"! It's a classic.

Of course, this is a Japanese release so there is also a CD version which is called "Fucking Skins Fucking Punks..." It includes two more new tracks ("Romford" and "Lets Ave It"), the track from the Christmas Fisting EP and a whole live show. But the live show isn't edited (meaning you have to listen to all of Johnny's drunken tuning) and vinyl is much cooler anyway. (Rudeness Records)

JOEL, BILLY "Glass Houses" LP

Yeah, this album kinda sucks. In fact, half of it is pretty excruciating. But it's interesting how punk and new wave was affecting the world and even forcing guys like Billy Joel to take sides and put their money where their mouth is.

The hits? Fuck the hits. "You May Be Right" is some dumb macho lie and "Sometimes A Fantasy", uh, it's okay, especially the Oh-Ohs on the chorus. But it's just trying to keep up with the Boss. "It's Still Rock N Roll" is an odd attempt at tying everything from current music trends to his own career back to Elvis and should live in a special category along with songs like "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" and "Should I Stay Or Should I Go". "Don't Ask Me Why" was the other hit and it's pretty fucking good. If Billy Joel wasn't so damaged and wasn't so desperate for acceptance, he could have just focused on songs like this and would have been an artist instead of a joke.

The really good songs on this album are two of the non-hits. "I Don't Want To Be Alone" and "Sleeping With The Television On" are wordy and smart and up enough to make me think that he must have had a couple of Elvis Costello records if not some Nick Lowe singles. It was a big boat. But they were all in it so why wouldn't they be aware of each other? If it weren't for the ghastly solos (sax and keyboards respectively) I'd say these songs were bona fide classics. But poor production choices leave them diamonds in the rough. It sounds ridiculous, but this album would have made a fucking brilliant EP.

(Epic)

LONGET, CLAUDINE "Cuddle Up With..." CD

I love Claudine Longet. She has the sweetest voice in the world. The fact that there's a weird air of tragedy and violence that surrounds her life after these recordings only adds another dimension. Longet retired and got married after these recordings. Two years later, her husband was shot to death by a gun that went off while in Longet's hand. Despite many rumors floating around at the time, Longet was only found guilty of criminal negligence.

This 24-track collection features almost everything she recorded in the early '70s for Barnaby Records. Spanning her albums "We've Only Just Begun" and "Let's Spend The Night Together" only three tracks miss out on this amazing collection of French pop music.

There's something so sweet and relaxing about her voice. It's partly to do with English being over-enunciated. Part of it is the silly orchestral arrangements. It's soft and sweet and her covers are impeccable. "Close To You", "I'll Be There", "God Only Knows"... It's all beautiful. But I have to say that the real highlights for me are Leonard Cohen's "Hey That's No Way To Say Goodbye" and Neil Young's "Birds".

(Vampi Soul)

MARCH VIOLETS "Natural History" LP

MARCH VIOLETS "Electric Shades" LP

There was a lot of crazy stuff happening around England at the start of the '80s. The Leeds music scene was crazy diverse with a

and "Paradise", I think are both near perfect modern hardcore records. They were one of the bands that really turned me around on the whole genre because they've sort of rejected the minimalist premise of old school hardcore and did their own thing to great effect.

You can look at the three things that I think separate old school from modern hardcore and see it as a draw. Paint It Black is my argument. Production values? Paint It Black has **HUGE** production. Their knowledge of studio technique and their ability to use it to their advantage rather than as an opportunity to dick around makes them one of the few hardcore bands that don't get watered down by big production.

Metal? You love it or you hate it. For me, I can enjoy it against my will and against my better judgment. At least with Paint It Black it's fairly tasteful. They don't really on chugga-chugga to be the character of every song.

As for the lyrics, Dan's lyrics may seem all over the place. But having met the guy a few times, he's about as sincere as you'll meet in the underground music biz. He's smart and funny and totally self-effacing. He's a good dude and I think he expresses himself well lyrically dealing with a broad number of topics with his own style.

Paint It Black is ultimately a hardcore band that is modernist because of their rejection of the basic minimalist principles. They are one of the few to do that to their advantage. Plus, they are amazing live.

I can't wait for post-modern hardcore.

(Jade Tree Records)

#### PARKWAY WRETCH "Homesick" CD

This is fucking slick! Coming from the D4 school of dual vocals, Parkway Wretch are a hell of a band. Is this just how bass players are supposed to sing? When the bassist sings it certainly reminds me of Paddy, especially like his tunes with Cleveland Bound Death Sentence. The guitar sounds more like the classic East Bay pop punk sound (which didn't have much to do with the East Bay). It's like the Rickets or a more accessible Crimpshrine.

There are a few things that separate Parkway Wretch from the great unwashed of pop punkers in suburban America. First of all, they are really great songs here. They aren't just a random selection of chords in the major key going fast – slow – fast – slow. There are some really good parts here. The fact that both singers sound really different, but great in their own ways is a big plus.

Aside from the music, there are some really cool lyrics. A lot of it is that sort of autobiographical format that we all slip into. But there are moments where the story supercedes the style and they come up with something really unique. "Call Her Not Kill Her" seems like a situation where there are more ideas than the lyrics would allow for. To get it all out, the poetry becomes a whole different thing. I hope these guys get some vinyl together at some point.

(www.formula13.com)

#### PINK FLOYD "Piper At The Gates Of Dawn" LP

Yeah, Johnny Rotten made his point and it was well taken. But now we can more seriously evaluate Pink Floyd, right? I love the early stuff as epitomized with this album. As odd as the opening number is, it's a clearly structured pop song where predictable guitar progressions are replaced with unusual, almost jazzy, chords and psychedelic playing and sound effects replace solos or lead vocals. "Lucifer Sam" follows with its dark pop message that rivals the Velvet Underground for pop art cool. The brilliant production is augmented by adventurous arrangements.

But at the core, this is a great pop record. The songs are comparatively simple when you think of what they would be doing just a few years later. This isn't so far removed from the Beatles who in hindsight were kind of poseurs in the psych world of London. This is an exciting record. I listen to this and can't help think, "Shit. Julie Christy probably fucked some guy while listening to this album!"

#### PINK FLOYD "Relics" LP

I was born in 1967, the year of the first Pink Floyd record. But that's not all. A lot of fucked up shit was happening and I do mean that in a positive way. There was something deflating about the recent passing of founding member Syd Barrett. He was one if not the most famous acid casualty getting booted from the band, eventually becoming a recluse after releasing two magically coded solo records. Recent journalistic attempts to subvert his accidental mystery only helped to make his recent death equally sad and pitiful.

"Relics" is my second favorite record by the group. As a singles collection, it's equally their "Direct Hits" and "Meaty Beaty Big And Bouncy". For me, it's been the only access to classic pop psychedelia like "Arnold Layne" and "See Emily Play". For a trainspotter, it's a bit frustrating as they leave off "Candy And A Currant Bun", "The Scarecrow" or "Apples And Oranges" in favor of several album tracks from "Pipers" and the "More" soundtrack. It's great for songs like "Interstellar Overdrive" and "The Nile Song" get some extra recognition. But it's just a bit confusing why they would rather release them twice rather than make available some long gone singles tracks.

Having said that, this is a great sounding record on its own right. Of course, I had never heard any of the singles before I heard this record. So for me it's not so hard to look at the whole. The heavy psych workouts are great and never get too ponderous. The pop singles tracks make sure of that. There's some classic '60s style drums and drum sounds. Surely it's an inspiration on the Beatles and the Stones. This record to me is a more fitting show of Barrett appreciation than one melodramatic ballad.

(Capitol Records)

#### PITCHFORK "Eucalyptus" LP

I love John and Rick. I love these guys. I love their music. Pitchfork is probably my favorite as I've got the most memories tied up with this music. I remember when I first met John. Cringer was down in San Diego playing a big show with Scream and Excel. Pitchfork was the first band on and was still a trio. They were amazing. They were the perfect West Coast response to Rites Of Spring. John was a young kid who took us to the shop nearby so we could buy soft drinks. To this day, he's still as excited and enthused about music as the first time I met him. I think this record showcases everything that is great about his guitar playing. It's crazy tuneful while experimental and challenging. I remember watching some interview with Eno where he called Hendrix the first electronic musician, as he was as interested in sounds as he was in notes. I think the same can be said for John. On this record he's carrying the melody on every song while pulling out all the stops in guitar trickery with harmonics, pick scrapes and other pick-up noises. It's fucking an inspiration.

Rick is also on fire with some of his most venomous lyrics. "Burn Pigs Burn" is a knife in the gut. And he doesn't let up there. "Rana" is pure poetry and the lyrics perfectly marry the big riff (I swear, it must have been somewhere in Blake's subconscious when he wrote the outro to "Chesterfield King"). I'm so happy this record is back in print.

(Swami)

#### QUEEN "Queen" LP

#### QUEEN "Queen II" LP

#### QUEEN "Sheer Heart Attack" LP

#### QUEEN "Night At The Opera" LP

#### QUEEN "Day At The Races" LP

#### QUEEN "News Of The World" LP

#### QUEEN "Jazz" LP

#### QUEEN "Live Killers" 2xLP

Queen are one of the first groups that I truly loved. They helped me survive ages 9 through 14 when I had a lot of shit going on in my head. Before I discovered the joys of punk, they were a band that was expanding my mind in all sorts of directions. I was in direct

shamelessly technological scene based around the drum machine. Most famously were the Sisters of Mercy and their Merciful Release label who would release the earliest recordings of the March Violets.

"Natural History" is a collection of the group's earliest singles. Starting with the group's debut, "Religious As Hell" EP, three of the four tracks are represented defining their unique sound. The super-simple electric percussion of the Dr. Rhythm is so clean, they barely sound like a band. It's as much anti-rock n roll as anything by PiL even with the sharp and jagged distorted guitars from Tom Ashton who along with bass player Laurence Elliot would be the only members to last the entirety of the band's career. The male and female vocals work together in a sort of scream/sung call and response lead by Simon Denbigh and complimented by Rosie Garland.

The line-up is the same for the groups follow up single, "Grooving In Green" with the title track something less manic and oddly reminiscent of PiL or maybe John Foxx. The female backing vocals make a big impression on the a-side.

The second side is mostly made up of tracks taken from the "Crow Baby" 7" and the "Snake Dance" 7". It's all pretty cool stuff. I have to assume that there were time constraints, as I don't really see why they would leave off a few tracks here and there. I know bands used to do that in order to let the singles still sell. That was back in the day of treating vinyl more respectfully and not just as a promotional gimmick.

With the release of "Snake Dance", the group was joined by vocalist Cleo Murray. I know that when she took over on vocals and Rosie Garland split, a lot of people think of that as the real end of the band. The later stuff is regarded sort of like the "Cut The Crap" era Clash. But I really like those last few singles. In fact, my favorite March Violets track of all comes out of this time.

"Electric Shades" came out in the States in 1986, two years after the release of "Natural History". This eight-song album collected the groups later singles starting with a remix of "Snake Dance". A great upbeat song, it signaled the end of the Denbigh/Garland era who were soon replaced by Cleo Murray who soon took over all vocal duties. Her richer vocals both gave the group more range as well as more commercial appeal, for better or for worse.

With almost non-existent contributions from Denbigh, the group released their most memorable record. "Deep" might be the groups most melodic and accessible moment. But it's a totally unforgettable hook. Like a mesh between Joy Division and the Primitives, it's a classic single backed up by the moody "El Dorado". If you were lucky enough to get the 12" version, you got a third, equally strong track titled "Electric Shades".

It's crazy to think that such an important band, which had a few years of commercial and critical success, would never record an actual album. Both of these releases are essentially singles collections. It makes you wonder what unreleased material exists in the vaults.

(Rebirth Records, Relativity Records)

PAINT IT BLACK "CVA" LP

PAINT IT BLACK "Paradise" LP

Modern hardcore has become something of a derogatory term. The very intent of, at least US hardcore, demands respect for the old school. Even the bands we thought were fucking lousy back in the early 80s are all now considered classics. I guess it's nice that all the old timers stick up for each other whether it's because they have some serious past together or because they found some middle ground at AA or NA. That's cool with me. Good or bad, it was hard and kind of bold to be in a hardcore band in the early days so they all deserve some credit for sure. I don't disagree.

It's odd how that respect for the old school has turned into a trashing of the new bands. Again, I don't totally disagree. Things change and in a form that was based on minimalism, the

idea of growth seems contrary to its raison d'être.

There is some great modern hardcore in this world. Good Riddance is almost totally consistent with their releases. There's great DIY hardcore from groups like RAMBO, Limp Wrist and Bury The Living (thought groups like that are really a whole different thing needing their own category). Paint It Black may be the best of the pack.

What makes these groups like Paint It Black in the modern tradition rather than old school turns out to be more than the fact that they are a product of recent times. Old school hardcore was a new aesthetic that was largely informed by the fast, military beats and the rapid fire vocals. Now that old school does represent certain bands in a certain time period and we can say that there are a finite number of old school hardcore bands, we can also find what unites them otherwise.

First of all, very, very few of the original hardcore bands had access to the kind of resources (money, gear, studios) that even lower rung hardcore bands of today have. The equipment was more primitive. The guitars were whatever you could afford. Recording meant either rushing to get a record's worth of material finished in little time or working in some Frankenstein studio built in a friend's garage. These resource limitations ended up being a positive in the minimalist nature of hardcore.

Modern hardcore is the opposite. Bands have Guitar Center Pro Accounts, top of the line gear... Most importantly, even a new hardcore band will often spend a week or more working out what should be a pretty basic record in a 24-track (or worse) studio. The proliferation of Pro-Tools has only made things worse.

Secondly, and this is somewhat related because it never could have happened without the advent of Galleon Krueger nightmares, the influence of heavy metal in the mid to late '80s has had a profound effect on all punk. It's kind of a nightmare. I like some metal like anyone else. But I think 99% of it is garbage. A lot of you aren't as old and gray as me (yes, and balding, you assholes) so you don't remember the wars between punks and metalheads. Just go back and watch "Heavy Metal Parking Lot" which is a true cautionary tale. We invited these people into our scene? No way, most punks fought it all the way. But when stupid bands like Slayer and Metallica started giving props to DRI, the Misfits and Discharge, everyone rolled over like the cowards we really were.

Heavy metal is like a carnie and hardcore was like the pimply, bespectacled, lonely teenage girl on the Ferris wheel. He flirts and sweet talks her, fucks her and then leaves town. Metal came and went, for the most part (last seen poisoning hip hop) and managed to leave behind its VD: chugga-chugga guitars. Shit, even I do it. It's the sound of modern hardcore. You can have all the old school elements working in your favor and maybe your singer can really sing. But at some point – oh shit – chugga-chugga. You're fucked. You can't resist it. You want it.

Finally, old school hardcore was by and large all about "ME". It was the '80s and even punk couldn't avoid Reagan's Me Generation. It was all super individualistic and self-important. In every other hardcore song from the early '80s you'll find the words either "I" or "me" and often it's about something being in his way and how it should probably get out of his way. Yes, I say "his way" because it was gender specific. Hardcore was all about him. It was dude unity; dudity. Sometimes there were politics, but those always seemed like the phoniest songs. It seemed like they felt they had to write the anti-nuke, anarchy song just because all the big British bands did.

Modern hardcore can be about anything. It can have the "I"/"me" format. But often there are sincere songs about everything from economics to animal rights. On the one hand, it makes modern hardcore much more broad and deep. But it's also inherently working against the minimalism of old school hardcore.

Paint It Black is fantastic. I really love this band "CVA"

violation of my distant mentors and imaginary surrogates at Creem who constantly derided them for their pretense and theatrical gimmicks. But I did really love the music and I was fascinated by the idea of homosexuality. Freddie Mercury forced me to take an honest look at my own sexuality and certainly made me curious about the "other". He did for me what Lou Reed and Bowie did for so many others.

But I'll be the first to admit that there is a lot of shit on their classic albums. I think they're amazing and whenever I bought one, it was the most exciting bus ride home of my life. I sort of feel I've spent the rest of my life trying to rediscover that feeling like a junky trying to recapture that first fix. This joy made me overlook a lot of corny crap. So here is my guide to what is great about the classic Queen albums.

The first one is actually my least favorite of them all. The production is too weird even for me. But the record includes two of the bands most rocking numbers. "Keep Yourself Alive" showcases everything great about the band. The vocals are powerful and melodic. The drums are huge even with a tasteful (by Queen standards) drum solo. The melodic and harmonized guitar solo is also key. "Great King Rat" is also a fantastic rock song made of several interesting parts that could each be their own song. The band didn't waste much on the epics and great parts were never in short supply.

"Queen II" is probably my favorite album of theirs and one of my all time faves from any band. Side Black is perfect. From the blinding shock of the first notes in "Ogre Battle" to the almost funky pop of "Seven Seas of Rhye", it feels like one great piece of music. The lyrics are all well over the top in the fantasy realm and "March Of The Black Queen" sounds like a D&D module. But the rapid-fire vocals and unimaginable harmonies make every moment a pure experience. I think it showcases some of Mercury's best piano work as well.

"Sheer Heart Attack" has a lot of goofy show tune type stuff that I always felt was sort of embarrassing. These little songs with ukuleles and shit were littered throughout their '70s albums. But some of the bands biggest rockers are here as well like "Brighton Rock", "Now I'm Here" and "Stone Cold Crazy". The first two, riff packed and catchy, outdo what Cheap Trick would be doing a few years later while "Stone Cold Crazy" is a thrasher that's as good as anything on the first Damned album. It's been played to death, but "Killer Queen" is still a great pop song that, along with "Misfire", seems as British as the Kinks "Arthur".

Everyone knows that "Night At The Opera" is the one with "Bohemian Rhapsody". But my two favorite tracks on the album are always forgotten. "Death On Two Legs" is a slick rocker with lyrics as vicious as anything from Walter Fagan. "Sweet Lady" is the Mott The Hoople power pop influence shining through again with great result. Surely that one should have been a hit. The often forgotten John Deacon also shines again with "You're My Best Friend" which might be their greatest song of all.

They followed that album up with the far less exciting "Day At The Races". "Somebody To Love" is an okay attempt at their version of Doo Wop. But it's "Tie Your Mother Down" that really saves this record and is worth the price of admission alone. Always riff heavy in the '70s, that song starts with the biggest riff ever played on God's green Earth. That riff has its own gravitational system. It's just that huge. These otherwise, borderline misogynistic lyrics seem sort of playful coming from Mercury.

Hey, even my Mom loved "News Of The World", "We Will Rock You" and "We Are The Champions", a couple of really weird songs to be international hits. We've heard them so much that we take them for granted. But they are a couple of really fucked songs! "We Will Rock You"? What the hell is that? Drums rants, chants and a totally odd guitar solo... The bridge in "We Are The Champions" is otherworldly leading to the most homoerotic song to ever be championed by hundreds of sports franchises. But

there are some other really great moments like the almost soulful "It's Late". Taylor and Deacon also contribute some big winners in the form of the fucked up punker "Sheer Heart Attack" and the sort of melodramatic "Spread Your Wings". I kind of like the super ridiculous "Who Needs You?" as well.

God, I love the gatefold photo for "Jazz". It's what I thought making a record was like when I was a kid. I love that stupid picture. When I was a kid I wanted all those guitars before I even knew what they all did. Remember what I said earlier about how Queen sort of urged me to question my sexuality? They really fucked me up with this record by including a poster of 50 or so naked women riding bicycles. When I look at it now, it seems so tame. But in 1978, it freaked me out. What can I say? "Fat Bottomed Girls" and "Dead On Time" rock better than the whole Kiss catalog. I totally ripped off "Leaving Home Ain't Easy" on a Cringer song called "Step Back" I even stole the 'blame no blames' phrase. "Don't Stop Me Now" is great pop like Elton John's goofier moments.

"Live Killers" was their last great record. I loved it, but I sort of knew it was over. It really felt like they were bringing something to an end. But it was pretty great for a live record. "Keep Yourself Alive" is considerably better than the studio version. Otherwise forgettable songs like "Let Me Entertain You" and "Love Of My Life" wind up being breathtaking. It's more chaotic than you would imagine.

After that they gave up their "No Synths" rule and were never the same. There are a couple of cool moments on the "Flash Gordon" soundtrack, the song with Bowie was nice and "The Game"... I dunno. I really don't like it. But I guess they had to change. The age that had made them even possible was over for better or for worse.

(Elektra Records)

RAINCOATS "s/t" LP

I bought this record solely based on a quote from John Lydon saying that all music was rubbish except for the Raincoats. I still love the record cover. It's self-conscious quasi-naïveté. It's perfect for this beautiful teetering color field of sound.

"No Side To Fall In" is still the greatest way to start a pop record ever. I love it. From that first screech of the violin to the humbly sweet harmonized vocals, it's a perfect post-modern pop song. Ditto for "Black And White" as well as their totally classic deconstruction of "Lola".

From there the album never lets up. There's quirky arrangements by a self-taught band pushing their own limits with wonderful vocals holding it all together. I don't know how to explain this kind of music. Imagine a lo-fi "Trout Mask Replica" coming from a pop or reggae background rather than the blues. Does that make sense?

(Rough Trade)

ROLLING STONES, THE "untitled" LP

In 1972, the Stones were meant to release a movie and a live LP. The movie is the notorious "Cocksucker Blues" which to this day is one of my favorite rockumentaries. It's a fucked document that manages to turn a glamorous rock-n-roll tour into a Kenneth Anger descent into maelstrom.

The live album was recorded for Decca and was never released. It got as far as the editing stage and now boots are everywhere. The band are as loose as in the flick, but it's cool to hear them roll through live versions of "Rocks Off", "Brown Sugar", "Heartbreaker", "All Down The Line", "Gimme Shelter", "Happy", "Tumbling Dice", "Love In Vain", "Sweet Virginia", "You Can't Always Get What You Want", "Midnight Rambler", "Bitch", "Jumpin Jack Flash", "Street Fighting Man", and "Rip This Joint". Mick Taylor was never totally represented on record. But live he was really in a groove and at this point he seemed to be the most confident.

I fucking love bootlegs from this period. I loved them as a kid and to hear something that was properly recorded for legitimate release is exciting and satisfying.

(Decca)

RUNDGREN, TODD "Something/Anything" 2xLP

Oh, 'I Saw The Light'! How can you go wrong with that song? Right? No? Fuck you guys. Look, I know he looks like your shitty uncle from Sausalito (maybe he is!) but he WAS cool and this record is the kind of thing that helps me remember that Bright Eyes is a fucking hack getting by on his Emo-via-Kelso looks and not on any degree of talent or relevance.

Todd Rundgren plays all the instruments on the first three beautiful sides. The songs are all mini-masterpieces of '70s pop. As often as he slinks into the singer/songwriter thing, he snaps up some silly little piece of unpretentious guffaw. Follow two moving love songs with a nerd's tribute to Wolfman Jack and you get the idea. The rock is evenly touched with r&b. For a totally contrived studio experience, it is amazingly funky at times. Oh God, don't let the carousel burn down!

By the time you get to the last side with the studio players, you've forgotten that this has been all Todd. The band side is loose and unedited creating the magic that hyper-real records like "The White Album" and "London Calling" had. You can even follow the incidental dialog in the liner notes. "If it's stupid enough, it's cool." I wish I knew all the subtext involved.

(Bearsville Records)

SPENCE, SKIP "Oar" LP

The legend of Skip Spence always seems to me like an incomplete story. Starting off in the Jefferson Airplane, he drummed on their first album having never touched a kit before. He quit soon after resurfacing as guitarist in Moby Grape. In 1968, while recording with the Grape, he experienced some sort of mental breakdown in the studio. There are different reports of his rampage from yelling and screaming fits to running through the control room with an axe. He was committed to Bellevue where he was contained and treated. Six months later, he put together a masterpiece of a solo record that would wind up being his final and greatest statement.

The album "Oar" is an eerie 22-song affair. Assuming you can't really separate the artist from the art, every track is a mystery and every pun has some deeper meaning. Musically, it's delta blues transmogrified by meds and psychedelics. There is an odd lightness to the whole project. Even the sound collages seem to be both meticulously and delicately put together. The doubled vocals and their utterly life-weary delivery add to the atmosphere.

Spence plays all the instruments on the record, which would have something to do with the laid back feel. He was probably pretty medicated at the time. Even the drums sound like rain patter more than percussion. The record is beautiful. It's a time capsule in a way. But there's something soothing and gentle. But beneath that lurks something much darker, which I think is a lot of the appeal of this record as a cult item. Part of it is knowing the story of Skip Spence. But you can't help feel that there is a darker side that he's seen and this record is meant to prevent you from seeing.

(Sundazed)

STINKY TOYS "s/t" LP

Weren't you curious too? Come on! I was a kid and I would read everything I could about the punk explosion. I read accounts of the punk festival at the 100 Club and was totally thrilled. The Clash, The Damned, The Pistols, Siouxsie and the Banshees, Subway Sect and some French band called the Stinky Toys. The other bands all fell into place for me as I began collecting the records. But even the live reviews had back then had a real ambivalence towards the Stinky Toys like they were clearly not invited to the party.

Ever since then I've been curious as hell. I didn't feel totally compelled to track down an expensive French import LP. I would see it around but it was pretty low on my list what with the Stones possibly putting together another half-assed compilation package.

This record isn't really what I expected. I thought it would either be arty-farty stuff that was the French being French and that got confused as punk. Either that or I thought they would just be a

rock or pop group with no real connection to punk at all.

But the Stinky Toys were a punk band and not too bad at all. Thing is, they've clearly got much more of a New York influence. With the exception of the fast rocking "Driver Blues", this record has a lot more in common with the first Patti Smith Group or even someone goofy like the Tuff Darts. There are even some Quine like guitar runs. The girl can sort of sing. But she can yell too and mixes it up pretty well like a young Vi Subversa. Imagine if Patti Smith wasn't a poet but that it was all just a bad translation from French. You get the idea. It's cool.

(Polydor)

STREETSIDE PROPHET "Talking To Walls" CD

Seven songs from the Phoenix areas latest offering and contribution to the punk world. I wonder how much of a scene there is for bands like Streetside Prophet and Parkway Wretch. These are a couple of really great pop punk bands with something to say. Neither are the most original band in the world. But who is? I can't judge on those standards, that's for sure. This stuff is solid. Ten years ago they would have been the hippest thing. Is there an audience or are these guys must making great music caught up in time's cruel law?

This is great sounding with a really rich guitar sound. It reminds me of the better moments of Samiam and especially the Van Pelt (I loved them). The vocals are that quivering tenor that reminds me so much of the early to mid '90s. There's a lot of that chord bass playing that's so great and Jawbreaker-ish.

God, that is a really terrible description of this group. It makes them sound so derivative. I mean, they certainly are to some extent. But it works and it sounds refreshing and not half-assed. Maybe it's the intensity of the performances. Maybe there is a more accurate way to judge the merits of the differing pop punk records. I hope there is as this record would rate very high for a debut.

(www.formula13.com)

SYMBOL SIX "s/t" 12"

Posh Boy was really the shit for a little while. I really got into a lot of the SoCal hardcore scene via the "Rodney on the ROQ" comps. They had the best records from TSOL, Social Distortion and Agent Orange. They also did the US version of the amazing "Punk And Disorderly" compilation.

Symbol Six were the last really great record to come out on the label. With only this four-song 12" to show, they captured a sound that defined OC punk. There were clear elements of Agent Orange with the classic track "Taxation" built around a great guitar riff feeling like "Everything Turns Grey". "Ego" utilizes great backing vocals that are like some of the best music from MIA.

It's a really solid record if you can ever find it. Don't be put off by the horrible record cover. It's a shame that this band didn't record more. But from what I remember from a later Flipside interview, one of the guitarists split or was booted. He was too punk and the rest of the band was getting into heavy metal and glam. It's hard to be a dignified musician in Southern California. Trust me to know.

(Posh Boy)

THOMPSON, RICHARD AND LINDA "I Want To See The Bright Lights Tonight" LP

From the first note, this is one of the greatest albums of all time. Sweet pop with breathtaking harmonies, they never went TOO folk like Fairport Convention. But it's folk enough that it's soothing while startlingly electric. There's a bit of tension. But just enough to keep it all interesting. The additional musicianship (horns here and there) is pretty and subdued enough as not to sound corny. As far as chill records, I put this right up there with "Harvest" and "Tapestry".

And the title track, I don't know what to say about a song so great. I will say this: it has to have a prominent place on the mix tape they play at my funeral. It somehow captures so many of my feelings without really saying anything.

(Island Records)

#### DEVIL AND DANIEL JOHNSTON. THE (dir. By Jeff Feuerzeig)

I'm not a super materialistic guy. When my house burned down a few years ago, it sucked that I lost all of my records. But it wasn't worth getting upset over. The one thing that I really do regret losing in the fire was my collection of Daniel Johnston drawings I had bought over time at Sound Exchange. I had them framed on the wall and distinctly remember going back to the wreckage after the fire and seeing the images of Captain America and a duck plastered onto the crumbling wall.

Jeff Feuerzeig is a great director with great taste. About a decade ago, he made another great documentary about my heroes, Half Japanese. While he maintains a lot of the humor he had with that film, the story of Daniel Johnston is much more complicated. Not avoiding any issue, the film follows Johnston's life, his break with reality and the many consequences. One of the most fascinating sequences involves Sonic Youth's Steve Shelley inviting Johnston to stay with him in New York and do some in-store performances. On this trip, he was one of many total breakdowns, attacks Shelley and goes missing with Thurston Moore and Lee Ranaldo driving around New York and New Jersey trying to find him. It's totally startling.

The amount of footage is incredible. Not only did he start making home movies as a teen, he kept detailed audio diaries for years. Feuerzeig also manages to get some great interviews with the family.

Of course, there is a lot of great music too. A lot of people don't get it. It's funny to read reviews of this film and the Half Japanese film. People either get it or not and usually it's the later (Sony Pictures)

#### GLADIATORS, THE (dir. By Peter Watkins)

#### PUNISHMENT PARK (dir. By Peter Watkins)

Peter Watkins has reached that magical point in his career where his body of work has so much integrity as well as longevity that he is virtually above criticism. His films are intelligent, attractive and in their own way righteous. It's certainly some combination of those three characteristics that prevent him from being considered a major film maker by film critic hacks everywhere.

"The Gladiators" is a great example of his main style. Shot somewhat as a faux documentary, the film could be qualified as science fiction as it takes place in the not too distant future. World Wars and conflicts have been reduced to a televised game. A computer using sonic mind control determines much of the results and military leaders sit comfortably watching from a monitoring station.

Like most great science fiction, the film is as much a critique of the times (the American War in Vietnam was raging at the time) as it is a warning of the direction world powers are pointing us. The soldiers are mismatched with some of them not even sure why they are participating. The military leaders make the real decisions that result in death and destruction. At the same time they are frustrated with the soldier's contradictions and insubordinations. The game becomes complicated when an outside agitator enters the field with the intention of destroying it once and for all. Unforeseen by him and the military leaders, a soldier from the Western forces befriends and helps a female captive from the Asian red forces. This development supercedes the game for the military leaders of both sides, as they decide to join forces to stamp out dissent.

"Punishment Park" takes the idea of a televised game even further. In this amazing film, American dissidents (each meant to represent a Black Panther, a Yippie, a pacifist, etc) are arrested for treason and sentenced by a secret tribunal of conservatives. All convicted, they are sent to Punishment Park. The park is set up as punishment for the revolutionaries as well as training for the police, army and National Guard. Set in what looks like Death Valley, the convicted have to make it across the desert and reach an American flag. In the meantime, the cops and military men are sent in to hunt them down.

This is all shot as a fake documentary with a British film crew covering the events. The directors outrage (part of the film was in response to the killings at Kent State) has grown since "The Gladiators" as even the fake documentary director eventually becomes angered by the unfairness and pointless violence of the park.

Peter Watkins has always been considered extremely controversial. I think as time goes on, he's less controversial and more of a social critic way ahead of his time. The fact that the films are so well done and convincingly acted helps as they are not at all tongue in cheek. "Punishment Park" could pass for reality.

What gets lost with all the talk about the content of these movies is the fact that, with "Punishment Park" especially, the films are quite beautiful. The desert looks amazing and the footage is sharp. They are a great reminder of what's been lost in the new age of hyper editing and digital technology. (New Yorker Video)

#### KILL YOUR IDOLS (dir. By Scott Crary)

This movie is really, really funny. Why? Because it takes a lot of lame bands like Black Dice to task. I read somewhere that this movie makes the Yeah Yeah Yeahs look like McDonald's in "Super Size Me". That's pretty funny to me.

This first third of the movie is actually genuinely interesting. I had never really seen footage of Teenage Jesus or DNA or any of these other great original No Wave groups. It's great quality archival footage. The film follows the progression through Sonic Youth and the Swans. There are some really great interviews with the always fascinating Lydia Lunch as well as the especially articulate Arto Lindsay.

Then there is about half an hour of footage of the new pre-fab No Wave revivalists like Black Dice, the Liars and their ilk. It's pretty painful listening to these shallow, bourgeois poseurs rant about their art and the scene and other things that don't exist.

Then the director throws his punch line. The film returns to the originators like Lydia Lunch, Michael Gira and Jim Thirwill and allows them to comment on the new jack no wave scene. Not only are their criticisms right on the money, the film goes a step further implying some relationship between these new downtown bands and groups like the Strokes. It's essentially the same rubbish approach and as radical as a Target commercial.

Like I said, this movie is very, very funny. (Palm Pictures)

#### WASSUP ROCKERS (dir. By Larry Clark)

Ah, Larry Clark. Nobody divides the film freaks more. Of all my film freak friends it seems like half of them (if not more) are sickened by Clark. Some people even think he makes kiddie porn. If it's not the open sexuality of the films, it's the uber-verite portrayal of aggression and violence. Something like two best friends having a quick punch up is handled differently by Clark than it would be by any other American film maker. He really lets you feel that adrenaline and a lot of people think of that as a kind of porn. Ultimately, when you get to the bottom of a lot of people's deeply emotional responses to his film, it's an overall negative, cynical, anger that they feel guides the movies and that frightens them. It's a fair point.

But I love his films. Any film is open to interpretation and seeing as I generally hate any movie that is number one in this country at any given time. I at least can respect Clark's detractors especially if they can acknowledge that their reaction is an emotional response and has more to do with gut feeling than a particular argument. For the most part, I really hate Hal Hartley movies though I don't have any specific problem with him. I dunno. Something about them just sort of makes me sick. Ditto for the guy that did "Metropolitan".

Besides, I was one of those people for a while. I hated "Kids" when I first saw it. I kept thinking, "these are the kids I used to hang out with and I hate them." I was one of those kids. I mean,

TREE, CHRISTOPHER "Spontaneous Sound" LP  
Christopher Tree was a strange guy. A percussive mystic, his version of improvisational music was actually an attempt at the divine with meditational overtones to it. Yeah, I know. "Meditational" is often code for snoozeville. But in this case, there are moments that really do remind me of this meditational disc I used to have made by Tibetan monks to help you with your own private Zen techniques.

In the same way that you can look at some of the more abstract Nurse With Wound pieces or even "Metal Machine Music" as an almost linear event with arcs and accents, so is the case with this record. While beautiful on its own (it's largely gong-like percussive instruments from around the world, all performed in one take spontaneously) it also has well defined timbre making for peaks and valleys. While not so dynamic as to take away from the instrumentation, it's actually quite a fascinating journey from start to finish.

(Quakebasket)

TZN XENNA "Dzieci Z Brudnej Ulicy" 7"

Between this record and the Dezerter 7" on Tonpress (a state run label) it was something of a running joke between me and my friends. It seemed like everyone had been getting so many copies of this record for trade, we all had a small arsenal of them. At one point I think I had 10 copies of each as well as some Polish compilation on the same label. I guess if the State is paying for everything you're not too worried about recouping or advances. You might as well send free copies of your record for trade out to as many places as possible.

While Dezerter have become known as a classic European hardcore band, I always was more fascinated by TZN Xenna. Sure, they were a hardcore band. But they were far more melodic than what was generally happening in Europe at the time. Starting with a little kids voice, the band tear into the title track. Good production versus kinda crappy musical equipment usually makes for a good combination and this record is a good example. Yeah, that's a nasty guitar sound but there's no hint of metal that was starting to poison the scene by 1985. There are only two tracks on this record, but they're both great. The singer is great using that melodic yell that seems so specific to European hardcore.

A couple of other songs from the same session wound up on the equally traded "Jak Punk To Punk" LP. A decade later, a tape came out titled "Ciemny Pokoj" and it collects a lot of different stuff from rough live recordings to random studio recordings. It's cool but nothing on the tape matches the material recorded for vinyl.

(Tonpress)

WHYSALL LANE "s/t" CD

One part Versus, one part Jawbreaker and one part crazy cat lady. What's weird is this CD starts with a song that almost sounds like They Might Be Giants on the wrong speed. Either that or the most melodic thing Nick Cave has done in years. It's really cool actually. Very sad.

So knowing what you know, this record has everything you want. On the one hand, there are some very clear Versus elements at work. Richard is singing with a new, more baritone style. It's cool. It's a new dimension to his already really interesting voice. His guitar playing is as interesting as it was with the best of Versus. Of course, the drums are powerful. But there is a lot of understated playing too. Just when you think Adam has started holding the sticks jazz style, you get his with his characteristic giant tom toms on "Time Machine" which is sort of the hit I think. It is actually very reminiscent of the Pixies there. Even the back-up vocals, though they sound nothing like Kim Deal, augment the main vocal in the same way.

Lots of interesting songwriting throughout. Great, sad lyrics as you might expect. But the arrangements are fantastic

too. Bits of keys are surprising without being overbearing. This is certainly the most interesting post-Versus project and probably the most interesting post-Jawbreaker recording too! (blackballrecords.com)

## FILM REVIEWS

BORDER RADIO (dir. By Allison Anders)

MÍ VIDA LOCA (dir. By Allison Anders)

I dig Allison Anders' movies. I think they're all pretty quality and consistent. Plus, there's something cool about her. She's smart and creative. But she's also sort of a nerd and kind of funny as well. On the one hand she comes from the indie film world with a lot of cred not the least of which is her relationship to the old LA punk scene. But at the same time, she was totally, even as an adult, obsessed with Duran Duran to the point where it was a big influence on her creatively.

I finally got to see "Border Radio" for the first time. I can totally see how some people feel that it's heavily influenced by Jarmusch. It's black and white and it has the off-putting pacing that "Stranger Than Paradise" has. It was her first movie and was certainly low budget. But it's cool and not just because the cast is made up of John Doe, Dave Alvin and people from Slash. In many ways, it's a mystery that's not a mystery more in the tradition of Wayne Wang's "Chan Is Missing". For all the noir aspects, the story becomes realistic and in the end, there is no pay off. It's a break from the mystery norm and is refreshing.

Chris D of Divine Horseman (a great film reference in a band name) plays a musician going through a creative crisis magnified by label problems. He also gets caught up in a break in and is forced to flee the country. His wife is left behind to try and sort everything out. Things get complicated as she finds out more and more about what the crime entailed. But the mystery becomes more of the movies subtext as the changing relationships and pretty genuine dialog takes over. I wouldn't know whether to describe this movie as a mystery or drama.

I've watched the movie twice in the last day or two and really love it. The awkward communication between the characters and the total strangeness of Tex from Tex and the Horseheads is totally compelling. Plus, Green On Red are in it and they were cool. I wonder why this isn't on DVD.

I decided to finally check out "Border Radio" because I had been revisiting "Mi Vida Loca" which is my favorite Anders film. What at the time was sort of caught up in media hoopla as being the first film to really deal with the subject of the '80s gang explosion and the women gang members ("Colors" was very one sided and was more about the cops than the kids) I think a lot of people still assume that this movie is an action flick or at least somehow sensationalistic.

"Mi Vida Loca", like "Border Radio" looks like one thing on paper while in reality it's another. Sure, the movie is an unapologetic look at the life. The gang girls are very sympathetic and the lure of gang life is shown for what it is without comment. There are guns, drugs and death.

But "Mi Vida Loca" is not an action film. It's certainly not exploitation cinema. It's a drama about two women who are best friends, driven apart by circumstance and then able to overcome it in a close and supportive community that happens to be part of the Echo Park gang. The cast is a mix of pro actors and real gang kids. There's a crazy romantic vibe to the whole film and the violence is never an action on its own, but more a way of emphasis on the changing relationships.

Both film are great in the way that they take a look at an aspect of SoCal culture and manage to avoid exploitation and cheap shots. Plus, they're both oddly shot with reverence and show the beauty you don't notice until you've spent time living in Los Angeles.

(Universal Studios HBO Home Video)

I was never one of the main characters, but I was definitely one of the kids hanging out on the couch with the rest of the scumbags. It took me some time to get over that and accept the film for what it was and not as something I was hoping to satiated or otherwise entertained by.

I guess that's enough of a disclaimer. Everyone seems to have to write some sort of disclaimer or explanation before saying anything positive about Larry Clark. I love 'Wassup Rockers' I think it's by far his best film. I think that if they could ever let their guard down, it's a film that even Clark haters could dig.

The film is based on a lot of different true stories all told by the kids to Clark. Clark befriended a group of teen Latino kids in South Central. These kids were not the stereotype. They grew their hair and wore tight pants and listened to hardcore punk. They even started a hardcore band that was really pretty good. They would get picked on by the black kids that would make fun of them for not being into hip hop and the clothes they wore. Banding together mostly to go skating, they were at odds with the gangbangers in the neighborhood.

The whole film features the actual kids who had originally told Clark the stories. They talk about their neighborhood. They also talk about universal issues with being a teen like first sexual encounters. While most of Clark's tales of teen life have a feel somewhere between "Lord of the Flies" and "A Clockwork Orange", this is probably more close to Truffaut which is an interesting experiment for the director. There's a scene where a 14 year old girl comes over and decides to seduce one of the virgins in the group. While he goes off with the girl, the rest sit around talking about their first sexual experiences. Though the scene mirrors a similar moment in "Kids", here it has an entirely different feel and is actually humorous and charming and that has everything to do with race and context. With "Wassup Rockers" having an entirely different mood than "Kids", this identical scene winds up making a very different point. These kids aren't competing with each other. They're just talking and trying to communicate. In a weird way, they're all sort of helping each other.

The kids make a plan to go to Beverly Hills to a skate spot they dig. Along the way they wind up in several little adventures including a run in with a couple of white girls from Beverly Hills High. This turns into one of the sweetest moments of the film where the one kid, about to lose his virginity to the white girl, winds up having a long, entirely improvised conversation comparing their lives. It's here that the title of the film is explained and if you've ever been in the same situation, it's quite funny. It's a very Holden Caulfield sort of vibe.

Actually, the whole movie is pretty funny. It's surely gonna automatically get categorized as a cult film. But it's very funny. In fact, most of Clark's films are quite funny if you can hang with it. I think that maybe because this film in general isn't as dark as something like 'Bully' (another film with some very funny moments) the humor seems a lot more obvious.

There have been a lot of criticisms of this flick and they pretty much divide into two categories with the same result. On the one hand, there are the film freaks who hate everything he has ever done, are horrified by the overall tone of his films and were never going to like this movie. On the other side were the avant-weirdos who think this film is way too tame. They miss the sex and violence that in their middle class reality somehow translates into 'honest film making'. It's really two sides of the same misunderstanding. Both sides are basically reducing Larry Clark's films into mere shock value which is true for none of his films. I think this film is evidence that he's a real film maker, not a pornographer and is trying to express something about young people that commercial interests and bourgeois paranoia have kept hidden. This film is certainly not PC. But it's very loving, raw, and weirdly hopeful.

There is a sick reality to some of Clark's fans. In the same way a lot of his critics can't see past the sex and violence, that's the only thing a lot of his fans look for. It's weird when you find out how many people there are like that. I've worked at video stores for years and years and it's still sort of funny to me. Movies like "Jackass" are huge rentals almost entirely because gay guys rent it to see young boy ass. In the same way, hetero dudes will rent a two hour long art film just to see Monica Bellucci sodomized in a Parisian underpass. The fact that the public can take any film and turn it into pornography makes me think that somebody should start critiquing pornography as if it were real cinema. Couldn't you analyze 'Girls Gone Wild' as a verite sociological overview?

This isn't the film for those people. Any sex in the film is either told in story or at best implied. I don't think there's any nudity in the entire film. Even the exotic dancer is clothed. Some people may see this as a bold step and a big chance for Clark. But I think it just shows that he only feels compelled to use sex and violence when needed. There's really no need for it in this film and even though there are many opportunities when he could have gratuitously inserted either, it's mostly avoided.

I think a lot of it has to do with what he's trying to get across overall with the kids in the film. For a movie like "Kids", they are all hyper-individualists. They're out to get laid and they'll fuck you over or fuck you up out of fear or despair. That's the way those kids think and that's the mood of the film. For the kids in "Wassup Rockers" it's a feeling of community and family that drives the characters. Though they don't know it, they are working out their conflicts through the collective. Sex is great. But it's not as important as the group and that is what this film centers on.

It's worth mentioning that there's a lot of great hardcore in this movie. It's sort of legitimizing another derided form of art and though I tend to get sick of this music in daily life. It's great to see it in a new context. I mean, it is good music.

## Comments?

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Atrocious Musical Taste

My Life as a Graf Artist

The Birth of Emo (One Version of Events)

The Birth of Emo (Another View)

Festivus 2005 Tour Diary

The Ex

The Instigators

Jesus Couldn't Drum

Sears

This Is My Fist

More stupid reviews...

The prisoner meets the muppet hi-fi north of Watford Junction  
We get in but we don't have fun so we leave before the truncheon  
Back to watch the day to day saga of working people  
Hang out the wash and clip coupons and generally being decent

Johnny Too Bad meets Johnny B. Goode in the Charing Cross Road.  
It's the only thing that happens in life says the East End jungle code  
All the Germans and all the French jam themselves down the tube  
And re-enact the Second World War while the rude boys get rude

And I look to my left  
And I look to my right  
I'm looking for a man  
I'm looking for a sign  
I don't wanna be the prisoner

The prisoner lives in Camden Town selling revolution  
The prisoner loads his jacking arm up amidst self-disillusion  
Your mother does the washing up; your old man digs the garden  
You're only free to dodge the cops  
And bunk the train to stardom

And I look to my left  
And I look to my right  
I'm looking for a man  
I'm looking for a sign  
I don't wanna be the prisoner